



INSTITUTE FOR DEFENSE ANALYSES

## **Understanding Terrorism Lessons of the Past – Indicators for the Future**

*No man can have in his mind a conception of the future, for it is not yet.  
But from our own conceptions of the past we make a future.*  
– Thomas Hobbs

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September 2004

Approved for public release;  
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IDA Paper P-3884

Log: H 04-000448

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## **PREFACE**

This paper has been prepared by Kings College London under contract to the Institute for Defense Analyses (IDA). This paper constitutes fulfillment of the IDA task order entitled “Understanding Terrorism,” sponsored by the Director of Net Assessment, Office of the Secretary of Defense. The paper addresses lessons learned from British experiences with the Irish Republican Army (IRA) and Spanish experiences with the Basque terrorist organization *Euzkadi Ta Azkatasuna* (ETA). The paper also identifies applications of these lessons to the current war on terrorism. The paper was based on numerous interviews with persons who have dealt with the IRA and ETA over the years. In order not to jeopardize the security of such persons, their names and affiliations are not disclosed.

The authors would like to thank Ms. Caroline Ziemke and Mr. Rob Johnston, both of IDA, for reviewing this paper.



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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Outlined below are findings and lessons learned pertaining to the emergence and evolution of two terrorist entities: the Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA) and Euzkadi Ta Azkatasung (“Basque Homeland and Liberty”) or ETA. This summary follows the organization of the main study report, with each section being covered in much greater detail in subsequent chapters. The last section summarizes the lessons learned from this analysis, including possible applications to Al Qaeda and the Global War on Terrorism.

### **EMERGENCE OF PIRA AND ETA**

- The British and Spanish failed to fully appreciate the historical context of the crises in which they became embroiled. This preconditioned the attitudes and responses of all of the parties involved in the conflicts.
- Terrorism rarely emerges out of spontaneous political and/or religious combustion. There are always diverse underlying factors that contribute to the emergence of a new terrorist threat. Understanding these factors is critical to understanding the motivations and rationale of the group itself and more importantly the community that provides the terrorists with support.
- Factors such as inequality, discrimination, political impotency, poverty, deprivation, a sense of injustice, and the resulting feelings of hopelessness lead to social conditions that encourage the emergence or reinvigoration of terrorist groups.
- A disproportionate response by the authorities can bring short-term security and political gains but usually multiplies terrorists and their supporters in the longer term. Terrorists seek to provoke a disproportionate response because such has benefited their cause so often in the past.
- Family traditions of violent protest ensure a steady stream of willing, radicalized young recruits to the cause.
- Schools, religious centres and other places of social interaction that teach extremism facilitate the emergence of terrorist groups and help sustain recruitment.

- Fundamentalist clergy who preach an extremist agenda and provide religious and moral legitimacy to the terrorists have a seriously destabilizing influence that must be countered and discredited—ideally by the faith they purport to represent.
- Extensive media exposure of terrorist activities and the authorities' responses inflame attitudes, polarize opinion and encourage further protest and even violence. Terrorists actively seek to exploit the media for their own ends.

## **ORGANIZATION AND EVOLUTION**

- It is vital to understand all of the unifying ideological motivations of each terrorist group, which may be more complex than they appear at first.
- At the outset, most nationalist and/or religiously inspired groups have absolutist goals that can probably never be achieved in the form desired and certainly not by a strategy based solely on the armed struggle.
- At the outset most groups embrace the armed struggle as the only or primary means of achieving their objectives. For a small minority, the armed struggle or Jihad, can become their defining precept.
- The desire to defend one's community against real or perceived oppression can be the most important motivating factor for many who join a terrorist movement. This desire can be strengthened by the anger resulting from a disproportionate response to terrorist attacks from the authorities.
- Even in a group not ideologically underpinned by religion, the impact of extremist clerics can still be significant, providing members with the appearance of divine authority, justification and forgiveness for any act.
- Terrorists are motivated by basic human factors as well as ideology.

### **Organization Structure**

- The PIRA adopted a quasi-military organizational structure in part because of tradition but also because when nothing else is known it is the most obvious to adopt, in order to prosecute a military style campaign.
- By assuming the paraphernalia of an army, the group seeks to legitimize itself and exploit the positive image of military service for recruitment purposes.
- While groups may utilize a typical military organizational structure (e.g., brigades, battalions and companies) and associated terminology, there is no standard table of organization and equipment in a terrorist movement—all units are different from each other in terms of structure, numbers, and tactics.

- The structure of a terrorist group is heavily influenced at all levels by the personality of its leaders, their family and/or ethnic backgrounds, available resources (principally manpower), and their role or function.
- Most terrorist groups quickly learn that the quasi-military structure is far too easy to observe, penetrate, and interdict and they therefore adopt a compartmentalized cellular structure with substantial lateral and hierarchical separation.
- A cellular network is exceptionally difficult to penetrate -- even groups with informers at all levels have managed to survive relatively intact although certainly with diminished capabilities. However, once a cell has been penetrated, the close family and community links that usually exist can be exploited in order to roll-up the cell and often the sub-network as well.
- New adaptations of the cellular structure have emerged in recent years. The PIRA has adopted the concept of special operations cells, which are formed from a pool of manpower for a specific task and disbanded afterwards. The ETA has created autonomous cells that operate with little connection to the wider movement,

### **Terrorist Leadership**

- There are three distinct generations of terrorist leadership: early leaders, follow-on and continuity leaders, and third generation leaders. The emergence of each generation is usually sequential, but all may hold leadership positions at the same time.
- While a single reason, most likely ideology or defense of ones community, may motivate some leaders, more usually they are motivated by a combination of factors, such as simple hatred, a desire for revenge, the attraction of power and status, the challenge, and family tradition.
- Most terrorist leaders develop a cult following to a greater or lesser extent. Such a following has strengths—blind obedience, devotion and loyalty, the followers' willingness to risk or give their lives—and weaknesses—emergence of unsuitable leaders, jealousies, a misguided belief in infallibility of the leader, development of cliques, and cronyism.
- The leadership style common to most terrorist groups is based on patronage and punishment—fear and reward.
- The better terrorist leaders can switch between leadership styles as the circumstances dictate: sometimes they will listen, more often they are

dictatorial. When necessary they will retain centralized command and control but they are also willing to devolve significant command responsibility to subordinates.

### **Command, Control, and Communications**

- Terrorist groups that retain centralized control over all or most operations are far more vulnerable than those that delegate substantial authority to subordinate commanders.
- Within groups that have adopted a cellular organization, senior leaders usually offer strategic direction, control resources, and maintain overall command of the campaign while devolving significant operational responsibility to intermediate and junior commanders—a form of terrorist “mission command.”
- Terrorist groups are increasingly relying on alternatives to telecommunications in order to avoid detection. Traditional espionage techniques have made a comeback, but for operations the careful use of cell phones and CB radios is still necessary. Decreased reliance on telecommunications can impose a considerable constraint on effective C2 but does significantly improve communications security.

### **How Terrorists Learn**

- Terrorists learn and adapt through a number of formal and informal processes, including:
  - Past Experience
  - Third Parties and Mentors
  - Reflection and Contemplation
  - Education and Training
  - Trial and Error
  - Research and Development
  - Intelligence
  - Lessons Learned and Red Teams

### **Recruitment**

- The underlying causes of the unrest—socio-economic conditions, political exclusion, and authority excesses—were the primary drivers for recruitment in the first instance and many early recruits to the PIRA were walk-ins who made their own way to the group because of personal motivations and to a lesser extent by peer, family, and community pressure. The quality of many of these early recruits was poor.



- The PIRA expertly manipulated the fear, anger and frustration of many nationalists and successfully goaded the authorities into continued overreaction in order to further radicalize the community, thereby attracting even more recruits.
- At this stage, all Republicans and not just PIRA volunteers were encouraged to seek out potential recruits and point them in the direction of the Republican Army.
- Over time, the removal of many of the underlying causes that motivated most early recruits did significantly reduce the reservoir of potential volunteers.
- Later recruits were primarily drawn to the PIRA by its ideology rather than by external factors, although the occasional excesses of the Security Forces could still inspire rage and indignation and did cause recruitment to spike.
- In time, the PIRA introduced a more formal system for selecting, screening, and inducting new recruits, and their emphasis changed from quantity to quality, which necessitated greater use of talent spotters.

### **Terrorist Weapons Capabilities**

- In reality, terrorist groups require relatively limited quantities of arms, ammunition and explosives in order to present a significant threat.
- However, operational expenditure, combat losses, and seizures will quickly erode limited stockpiles, and increased efforts are needed to secure weapons from the black market and international supporters.
- Improvements in national security capabilities will prompt the terrorist to seek more sophisticated weaponry up to a point—automatic rifles, grenade launchers, sniper rifles, night vision goggles, anti-tank weapons etc.
- However, the PIRA and ETA have rarely sought exotic weapons except to exploit specific vulnerabilities or attack otherwise invulnerable high value targets (e.g., Heavy Machine Guns and MANPADS to attack Army aviation). By and large, small arms, light support weapons, and explosives have been the weapons of choice.
- The development of an indigenous arms and explosives manufacturing capability provided both groups with a ready supply of relatively cheap weapons, purpose built to meet their unique operational requirements.
- The need for storage, maintenance, issue, and recovery of terrorist weapons leads to vulnerabilities related to detection, observation, and interdiction.

Resources devoted to detection and surveillance of arms caches will pay dividends for the authorities.

- The most effective method for significantly reducing the flow of sophisticated weaponry is to interdict terrorist financing.

### **Methods of Operations**

- Irrespective of ethnic background and ideology, most terrorist groups conduct broadly similar types of operations with differences limited largely to sophistication, scale, and the specific weapons used.
- Both groups have in the past recognized that their aims and objectives would not be best served by the use of suicide bombers or by killing large numbers of victims. That said, some leaders would probably do so without hesitation if it would further the cause.
- The PIRA in particular has demonstrated the ability to conduct attacks of mass destruction and it could be argued that September 11, 2001, apart, the most financially devastating single terrorist attacks ever conducted were perpetrated by the PIRA.
- The key factors determining what attack options are selected include location, value, and vulnerability of the target; operational security considerations and escape options; preferences of cell leaders; available resources; and the function of the cell.
- Having selected a particular target, terrorists have shown their willingness to wait months and even years until vulnerabilities have been detected and/or a suitable tactic or weapon has been developed or acquired to attack it. They have also been willing to continually attack a specific type of target until the desired effect is achieved.

### **Planning and Targeting Process**

- The operational planning process is usually undertaken by a cell or subgroup leader at the lower levels and by dedicated Operations Officers or specialist teams at the higher levels of the network. Direction of subordinate commanders may include instructions to attack a particular type of target or to utilize a certain type of weapon.
- All terrorists and many of their supporters and sympathizers are intelligence collectors and are always alert to potential targets and vulnerabilities.

- Larger terrorist groups are also able to deploy dedicated intelligence teams capable of undertaking effective target surveillance and even technical or physical penetration.

### **Terrorist Training**

- Most terrorist activities require minimal training.
- The majority of volunteers are employed in supporting roles or on simple operations. Providing even basic training for these individuals is not necessary or cost-effective.
- Even for more complex operations, the majority of those involved do not require even the most basic military skills. Only those who are actually required to conduct a technical aspect of an operation will require and get the necessary training.
- Brigade staff and cell members with the appropriate skills and experience conduct most training in-house. Thereafter, for low-level support staff and cell members most training is conducted on the job.
- For the purposes of training, dedicated al Qaeda style camps are a luxury that most groups cannot afford or do not actually need in order to train effectively for the types of operations they are likely to mount. Instead, both the PIRA and the ETA would organize ad hoc training events usually conducted in safe havens in the Republic of Ireland and France.
- The availability of safe havens was critical to the success of both groups -- particularly in the early years.

### **Internal Security**

- Operational Security in terrorist movements is often poor in the early stages of their evolution. However, the creation of an internal security organization significantly improves the operational security of a terrorist group.
- In time, operational security will also improve within the wider movement with countersurveillance drills, the “need-to-know” process, and security screens becoming the norm for all operations.

### **Terrorist Financing**

- Funding is a critical element of any terrorist campaign, and without access to an adequate and steady flow of money the scale and intensity of any campaign is bound to decrease. That said a terrorist campaign could still be mounted with a very limited budget.

- Sympathizers and supporters can make substantial voluntary donations to terrorist movements, and they cannot be stopped by law enforcement action alone. Disconnecting a terrorist organization from its support base is therefore critical.
- Criminal activities can net terrorists significant sums of money. International support from immigrant communities living abroad is another significant source of terrorist funding.
- At various times, PIRA and the ETA have enjoyed the largesse of like-minded terrorist groups and certain pariah states willing to fund terrorist activities.

### **Terrorist Logistics**

- The Logistics, or Quarter Master (QM) department is one of the mostly tightly controlled entities within a terrorist movement, but knowledge within the QM chain may be shared quite widely.
- The creation of dedicated engineering and R&D departments will significantly increase the lethality and effectiveness of improvised weapons, initiation devices, and homemade explosives; lessen the terrorist's reliance on unreliable and vulnerable external sources; decrease funding requirements; and reduce the need to maintain large stockpiles. Improvisation is not the last resort of the desperate.

### **Perception Management**

- Both the PIRA and ETA have shown the capability to develop and manage a complex information campaign with sophisticated messages aimed at diverse audiences via multiple media channels.
- Both groups have sought to manipulate or exploit the media in order to grab the headlines and ensure the widest coverage for their actions and messages.
- All too often, the authorities have failed to respond quickly to breaking events and have not been adequately prepared to quickly counter terrorist propaganda.

### **The Moral Dimension**

- All the evidence suggests that certain leaders of the PIRA and the ETA would exploit any tactic including suicide bombing and attacks inflicting mass casualties if it determined that such actions would contribute to the furtherance of its aims.

- The main limiting factor on both groups has been the background and attitudes of the constituencies from which they draw their support. If these constituencies were opposed to a particular tactics or excessive levels of violence, then the actions of the group were usually limited in order to avoid the risk of alienating that vital support base. Both groups on occasions have miscalculated and conducted attacks that have undermine their traditional support base.

### **Criteria for Success**

- Traditional definitions of success or failure may not apply in the War Against Terrorism.
- Short-term tactical successes can actually have a negative impact on the long-term strategy to defeat or eliminate the terrorist threat and may even reinvigorate the terrorist movement if the use of force is disproportionate.
- Terrorist groups like the PIRA have a long-war strategy and are able to accept/absorb continual tactical failures if the long-term aims of the group are being furthered.
- The inability to prevent terrorist attacks or personnel losses is not a failure as long as there is an established long-term counterterrorism strategy that is succeeding.

### **Support Base**

- The maintenance of a broad support base is critical to the success of any terrorist campaign. Such support can be categorized as either active (a minority) or passive (the majority).
- Terrorist sympathizers and the terrorists themselves share broadly similar ethnic and/or ideological backgrounds.
- Sympathizers provide their support for a variety of reasons, the most difficult of which to break is “tribal” loyalty.
- Most other links can be broken by dealing with underlying causes, winning a war of ideas, and by aggressive direct action that is seen to be legal and proportionate.

### **COUNTERTERRORISM**

- In the early days of the campaigns against the PIRA and ETA, the security forces were perceived as being biased -- the tool of one group to be deployed against the other – and not enforcing the law with impartiality.

- Improper handling of the media by the authorities along with the terrorists' use of public relations traps and provocations designed to elicit overreaction by the security forces were major factors leading to problems of public perception and absence of trust.
- For many years, the British political and security establishment failed to address and effectively resolve the issue of primacy in a multiagency security environment. This inhibited the determination of agreed strategies, risked duplication of and nugatory effort, and increased the risk of friendly fire.
- The authorities failed to recognize the requirement for a holistic strategy that addressed the causes of terrorism as well as its execution. In such a strategy, the security response to the threat would be important but would not be the only approach.
- The process of assessing the capabilities required to counter a terrorist threat has been largely iterative in both the UK and Spain. Although this process has resulted in the eventual creation of a highly effective complement of capabilities, the creation of this capability set was not the result of an early and coherent analysis of needs.
- The failure to conduct a coherent needs analysis in Northern Ireland has meant that both the police and British Army have been required to conduct tasks for which they are not best suited.
- With hindsight, many interviewees agreed that a paramilitary force like the Spanish Guardia Civil should have been created to undertake the high end of the law enforcement contribution to counterterrorism and the low end of the military's contribution.
- During the early days of the security campaign in Northern Ireland, C2 arrangements reflected a failure to understand the complexities of a multiagency environment. The absence of primacy and/or clearly delineated command responsibilities was often compounded by equivalent ranked military and police having overlapping boundaries and areas of responsibility.
- Differences in training and operational perspectives frequently resulted in friction and open conflict between commanders from different organizations over the way to respond to given events.
- Some commanders adopted a rigid interpretation of primacy believing it to mean Command Authority, which resulted in conflict and a failure to utilise all assets effectively

- In order to resolve the problems of primacy and geographical boundaries an effective committee system was introduced which optimised the benefits of the multiagency environment while minimising its difficulties. The committee system does however need to be supplemented with additional interaction as and when necessary.
- Command and control for both the general intelligence community and covert collectors was poor in the early days of both campaigns. Indeed, the tensions and frictions may have been greater in these highly sensitive and dangerous areas than was the case elsewhere.
- In Northern Ireland, once primacy was placed in the hands of the police Special Branch, a committee structure was established at the appropriate level of access to manage and direct the intelligence campaign.
- The Regional Head of Special Branch was the executive level of command for all intelligence operations with military liaison officers accredited to him from equivalent brigade-level headquarters and from specialist units.
- The British committee system was deemed to have functioned extremely successfully, but the team noted the degree to which this success was founded on a more informal and unofficial level of interchange between key individuals. This necessitated ensuring that the right man was placed in the right post to facilitate effective personal relations.
- The Regional Source Units and Regional Tasking and Coordination Groups are deemed to be among the most important and successful innovations of the campaign in Northern Ireland, revolutionizing the management and tasking of intelligence assets and the coordination of intelligence operations.
- The recent creation by the UK Government of a very high-level collection management committee is a belated but very positive development that will ensure that all regional and national collectors are fully coordinated and deconflicted.

## **LESSONS LEARNED – APPLICATION TO GLOBAL WAR ON TERROR**

- Understand the historical background when dealing with a particular community. Reactions of a community to Coalition Forces may be preconditioned on their experiences with earlier interventions by other nations whose religious and/or ethnic background is similar to those represented by Coalition troops.

- Target immigrant communities for information operations. Groups like Al Qaeda will seek direct or indirect support from immigrant communities in other nations, and will also seek to use such communities as Trojan horses from which to strike the homeland of these or other nations. The Coalition should deploy an effective information strategy aimed at each and every vulnerable immigrant community to counter radical influences in these communities.
- Be consistent in applying the law. In the current war on terrorism, we must ensure that everything we do confirms to our own (ideally, internationally accepted) code of conduct and legal system. We cannot promote liberal democracy while denying its protection and privileges to those we are seeking to convert. When countries act outside their own and internationally accepted standards of conduct they are at greatest risk. Conversely, when they act within suitably amended domestic law and are able to secure international support for their actions, the greatest successes have been achieved and terrorists most threatened. All the evidence suggests that applying double standards will lead to loss of domestic and international support and will be expertly exploited by the terrorists to legitimize their actions and further alienate the community supporting them from the authorities.
- Exploit early windows of opportunity. Establish security and the rule of law early on to buy time for later efforts to address underlying causes of terrorism. Law and order must be maintained in order to buy the time needed for other strands of the counter-terrorist strategy to succeed. Once the terrorists cross a certain threshold of violence, the pressure for decisive offensive action may become so great that the war of ideas is suspended and efforts to diminish underlying causes are stalled or undermined.
- Avoid provocations and disproportionate responses to terrorist acts. Any action that reinforces a community's sense of victimization, discrimination, and insecurity is likely to increase support for a terrorist group – not reduce it. Such actions are likely to be ruthlessly exploited by the terrorists to promote their own agenda and justify their violent actions.
- Promote moderate educational alternatives where possible. Counter attempts to exploit education to radicalize the young whenever and wherever we can, while accepting that parents have a right to demand an education for their children and in some communities schools that promote an extremist agenda are the only source of that education.



- Neutralize radical clerics. Clerics who incite violence and offer divine justification for these acts of violence must be banned or arrested, while we should encourage leaders of a particular faith who speak out and condemn such activities.
- Develop an intimate understanding of the tenets of those religious faiths which are being distorted by extremist clerics. We must compete effectively with such clerics in the war of ideas and promote moderate alternatives to such radical teachings. We must persuade moderate religious leaders to speak out against violence using their “scripture” to reinforce the message.
- Develop an effective and proactive information strategy. Do not allow terrorists to dominate the news agenda. If an incident occurs, media teams must be the first on the ground and the first out with a factual story, even if this means admitting that mistakes have been made. Be the first out with bad news and then set that bad news in context. Timeliness of media response is more important than comprehensiveness. By the time the “real story” is finally released by the authorities, the perception battle has already been lost. The public-relations observe, orient, decide and act (OODA) loop is counted in minutes rather than hours in the 24-hour media age.
- Train everyone in effective media relations. Every asset deployed to combat terrorism must be aware of its role in the information campaign, and be adequately prepared to play an appropriate part. The attitude, behaviour, and pronouncements of every soldier and official can have a bearing on the success of the campaign. All personnel must therefore understand the strategic impact their individual actions can have and be adequately trained to deal with the media.
- Set achievable information operations goals when dealing with hostile communities. We are unlikely to encourage hostile communities to like us, to joyously accept our intervention, or want what we want. All that is needed is for the community to withdraw its support for the terrorists, offer a grudging acknowledgment of the need to restore law and order, and be willing to pursue non-violent methods to achieve its objectives.
- Allow outlets for expression of discontent. Media bans can be effective, but only when deployed as part of a broader information campaign that allows other expressions of protest to be heard, even if these views are opposed to our own. Aggrieved communities must have outlets for their anger and vehicles to express their opposition. Media bans must be used precisely and not as a blunt instrument.

- Understand the complex mix of human factors motivating individuals to join or support a terrorist organization. Such factors can occasionally be manipulated to persuade certain individuals to turn against the organization and work for the authorities. An adequate human factors analysis capability must therefore be developed to exploit the human condition and circumvent the terrorist group's ideology.
- Engage moderate community leaders in dialog. Effective channels of communication must be developed between the authorities ("coalition") and moderate leaders of the community from which the terrorists draw their support. Bias, prejudice, and cultural/historical ignorance must not be allowed to blind the authorities to the need for such channels.
- Target the supporting community, not the terrorists. Experience suggests that a long-term strategy for winning the war of ideas can ultimately succeed, but only when directed against the wider community from which the terrorist group draws its support. There is little evidence that a war of ideas will persuade many members of the group itself to give up their perceived struggle.
- Provide alternatives to terrorism. A significant number of those who joined the IRA—and to a lesser extent the ETA—in the early days did so to defend their community or cause. In itself, this is an honorable motivation. It is therefore essential to devise strategies for persuading these essentially decent people that there are alternative avenues for them to pursue. This strategy should also be aimed at reducing their sense of insecurity and fear of security forces. Otherwise, yet again, the terrorist will find a ready source of idealistic recruits who can then be indoctrinated.
- Steel counterterrorism agents to be able to engage the terrorist. Despite the horrified reaction to the atrocities the terrorist commits, bitter experience has shown that allowing feelings of revulsion, anger, and despair to determine our strategy for defeating the terrorists will be counterproductive. Turning terrorists and, more importantly, decreasing the level of community support and the flow of recruits requires a deep understanding and the appearance of respect at least for the causes and grievances the terrorists purport to represent. A willingness to listen and take seriously the real and perceived grievances of an aggrieved community is also essential.
- Exploit the quasi-military organizational structure of terrorist groups. Having adopted a quasi-military structure, most groups are vulnerable to government security force measures, and an aggressive counterterrorist strategy can do serious damage to groups organized in this way. However, as a result of their

failure, some groups quickly realize that they must adopt a compartmentalized cellular structure in order to survive. If such a structure can be fully established, the chances of success for a strategy based solely on counterterrorism are greatly diminished. In the future, emerging groups are likely to adopt a cellular structure from the outset.

- Cultivate vulnerabilities. For some time after adopting a cellular structure, terrorist groups remain vulnerable to penetration, as many members are well known to each other even if they end up in different cells. Strong family and community ties, which can be exploited, also persist within individual cells and subnetworks. Recruiting informants at this time will pay dividends because as new members join the cells, established links will ‘rust-out’ or break. The tactic of forming cells for specific tasks and then standing them down does, however, make the task of detecting and penetrating them much more difficult.
- Follow the logistics trail. Efforts devoted to the detection and surveillance of terrorist Quarter Masters and arms caches can yield disproportionate benefits. These individuals have contacts throughout a group or subnetwork, and their recruitment or the observation of their activities can lead to the identification of cells and key personalities. Weapons and other equipment can also be observed or manipulated in order to follow the terrorist’s trail.
- Don’t ignore follow-on leaders. It is somewhat ironic that far more dangerous leaders emerged as a direct result of the success of the UK’s counterterrorism strategy to eliminate early leaders of the PIRA. It is clear, therefore, that a strategy that focuses on senior leadership and does not also consider their many able followers runs the risk of missing emergent leaders. In the context of al Qaeda, it is possible to conclude that the emergent leadership of that network will be drawn from those young hard-core followers personally recruited by Osama Bin Laden and other senior leaders during the 1990s. At the present time, many of these potential leaders are probably commanding cells abroad or remain close to one of the senior leadership. The great concern is that, if they follow the IRA pattern, they will be even more dedicated, ruthless, and capable than the current leadership and much more secretive and therefore even more difficult to find.
- Know and understand the nature of terrorist leadership, the motivations of the commanders, and their leadership styles. Unfortunately, our understanding of terrorist leaders is frequently colored by our own prejudices. We feel revulsion for their actions, contempt for their abilities and qualities, and a total

disregard for their motivations. These leaders are all too often thought of as “murdering cowards” and “criminals” rather than as dangerous and worthy adversaries who have presented conventionally organized militaries and law enforcement agencies with numerous challenges. After their secret meeting with the IRA in 1972, several senior British officials mistakenly confused the PIRA representatives’ lack of refinement, limited education and somewhat inarticulate speech with inferiority. This was a mistake and the lesson was not lost on the two young emerging leaders also present at those discussions, Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness. Over the years, they would earn the grudging respect of many senior British army officers, but not before the unnecessary expenditure of too much “blood and treasure.”

- Decapitate the organization. Terrorist leadership is based largely on a Cult of Personality, consequently, removing or degrading key leaders can have a disproportionate impact on the combat effectiveness of the group, at least in the short to medium terms. Put simply, cult leaders do not normally encourage the development of able subordinates capable of replacing them at short notice. Damage the leader and you can seriously damage his cell or network.
- Exploit terrorist leaders’ vulnerabilities. Understanding and exploiting specific personality traits manifest in most terrorist leaders can be a very effective strategy. Narcissism and vanity make some leaders susceptible to flattery and blind to their own shortcomings. Their excessive suspiciousness and paranoia, recklessness, or extreme cautions are all failings that can be manipulated to good effect.
- Learn from terrorists’ mistakes. A common comment from security force personnel when assessing a terrorist attack or weapon is “why on earth did he do that.” It must be remembered that terrorists do not have the luxury of sophisticated research and development facilities and doctrine development centers. More often than not terrorists have to test a new tactic or weapon in the field to determine if it will work. This approach may often fail, sometimes resulting in the injury, capture, or death of a volunteer. Attributing this to terrorist stupidity (the paddy factor) is a very dangerous miscalculation of the terrorist approach to learning. Chances are that at some point in the future the terrorist will have refined a tactic or modified a weapon to deadly effect. It is therefore vital that security forces learn as much from terrorists’ mistakes and failure as the terrorists themselves and that countermeasures be developed for the time when they get it right.

- Confuse the enemy. The smart terrorist will seek to develop a variety of methods for learning the lessons of success and failure and for developing approaches that will avoid security force strengths and exploit perceived weaknesses. It is therefore essential that considerable effort be devoted to identifying and understanding these methods. Once known, it is possible to manipulate these approaches in order to disrupt operations or at least slow down the learning process.
- Catch the small fry. The PIRA uses larger numbers of low grade operatives to carry out many of the necessary support tasks, including intelligence collection, leaving the best free to conduct offensive operations. If this pool of the possibly less committed and the certainly less able can be reduced, the operational effectiveness of the group will be significantly affected. More able volunteers would then have to be deployed to conduct the more observable support tasks. Devoting effort to detect and remove the “small fry” (by arrest or persuasion) is therefore worthwhile, rather than simply focusing on the leadership and the more deadly operatives.
- Secure international support. It is absolutely vital that international support is secured and maintained in order to reduce terrorist funding, disrupt arms purchases, interdict supply routes, and deny safe storage sites. The UK government would never have been able to significantly reduce the supply of weapons to the IRA without the eventual active cooperation of the Irish, American, and French governments in particular. Likewise, the Spanish government’s efforts to disrupt the ETA improved immeasurably once the French government began to cooperate in order to deny safe havens and funding sources. To secure and maintain that level of international cooperation, both Governments had to develop counterterrorist strategies that were proportionate, legal, and, broadly speaking, within internationally accepted norms.
- Understand that terrorists can do much with little training. Given that most terrorist operations are relatively simple and do not require significant skill levels, most volunteers clearly only need minimal training. Likewise, most members of an ASU or Spec Ops team only need training for their specific task. Providing bare bones training is therefore cost-effective for the terrorists and reduces the profile of any training program thereby improving the security of the group. Thus, for the terrorist at least, less really is more. An authority cannot afford to underestimate the capabilities of a terrorist because training appears to be minimal and ad hoc in nature. Some experts have dismissed the

threat posed by the PIRA and the ETA when compared with al Qaeda, in part because of the apparent difference between the training regimes of the groups. It is important to remember, however, that both the PIRA and the ETA have been able to develop cost-effective training organizations, capable of producing significant numbers of highly competent operatives, under the very noses of the British and Spanish authorities, without need for the sophisticated training infrastructure created by al Qaeda. It is conceivable, then, that dismantling al Qaeda's camps will not necessarily diminish its operational effectiveness in the longer term. By following the PIRA/ETA model, al Qaeda can do as much or more with much less.

- Penetrate internal security. The internal security arm of a terrorist group like the PIRA will develop an intimate understanding of all aspects of the organization—its structure, membership, and capabilities. A concerted effort to identify and “turn” one of the “unknowns,” as security officers are called, will therefore pay dividends and can seriously destabilize a group.
- Exploit fear. The methods used and the power of internal security teams can create a climate of fear within the group. Almost certainly, suspicion will erroneously fall on loyal members of the movement, and punishments will create a sense of resentment and even a desire for revenge. The punishment or disappearance of suspected informers or collaborators can also alienate the wider community. These anxieties and enmities can be exploited to turn other members of the group or as ammunition in the war of ideas.
- Detect and observe. A variety of technologies and capabilities are needed in order to locate and monitor terrorist weapons dumps and caches. This includes human surveillance assets, remote sensors and alarms, and low-level aerial reconnaissance sensors (e.g., visual, thermal, and IRLS). Various means for covertly tagging (“jarking”) and deactivating terrorist weapons should also be deployed.
- Wage effects-based warfare. Counterterrorism forces must avoid a “body count” mentality when determining success against a terrorist or insurgent adversary. Typically, these groups can absorb significant numbers of casualties (killed or arrested) without any significant impact on morale or effectiveness. There is no military style measure of noncombat effectiveness in a terrorist movement. The group can also tolerate the failure or more usually the abandonment of most operations. The only consideration for the terrorist is whether the long-term aims of the group are being achieved and whether the support of its constituency is being maintained. The campaign

against such groups must therefore be “effects-based” and the effects that must be achieved need to be broader than simply the elimination of individual terrorists.

- Recognize differences among terrorist supporters. Most of the terrorist group’s support base comprises passive sympathizers who often give their support because of loyalty, tradition, grievances, and fear, not because of a strong belief in the ideology or the methods of the group. It is therefore vital that passive supporters are not “tarred with the same brush” as the terrorists or their hard-core active sympathizers. Passive supporters can be won over but only if they are treated dispassionately and impartially. When the British treated all Catholics as Republicans, sympathies for the PIRA increased. When they did not, it decreased. This natural tendency to equate shared ethnic identity, similar ideologies (e.g., religion), and passive support as synonymous with terrorism must therefore be avoided at all costs.
- Implement a three-pronged approach to counter-terrorism. Separating a terrorist group from its support base will inflict a significant and ultimately fatal blow and must therefore be one of the primary objectives of any counterterrorism strategy. A common theme throughout this paper is the trinity of approaches that must be implemented to achieve this. Effective and robust offensive action must be taken to contain and reduce the immediate threat posed by the terrorists. Such actions must, however, be legal and proportionate, wherever possible, to avoid alienating the very communities we are trying to influence. At the same time, significant efforts have to be directed toward resolving the real underlying causes that motivate so many to join or support a terrorist group. In unison with these other two approaches, a war of ideas must also be fought in order to change and shape the perceptions of a wide range of target audiences. Implemented effectively and over time, this combined approach can defeat or at least reduce the threat of terrorism.





# **I. INTRODUCTION**

## **BACKGROUND**

A review of the evolution and adaptation of other terrorist organizations in the face of effective counterterrorist activities is likely to provide useful information in an effort to counter adaptive activity on the part of al Qaeda. In a preliminary examination of the way in which terrorist groups such as the Provisional IRA and the ETA (*Euzkadi Ta Azkatasuna*, which stands for Basque Homeland and Liberty) have emerged and evolved, King's College of London showed that certain common modes of operation, patterns of activity, and organizational development can be identified. While it is accepted that al Qaeda is quite different from these other groups in several key respects, certain similarities in the way al Qaeda and other groups have been organized, trained, and equipped have been identified.

In part, such similarities may simply be coincidental. In order to survive and succeed, terrorist groups can only develop in a limited number of ways. However, such similarities may also occur by design, either through study and/or cooperation. Indeed, it is well known that many terrorist groups, including al Qaeda, share knowledge, experience and resources, and may even encourage, support, or assist each other with certain operations. The recent revelation of links between the PIRA and the FARC in Columbia is but the latest example of such cooperation. The training camps of Afghanistan have also afforded al Qaeda the opportunity to study, codify, and disseminate lessons learned from its and others' past experience.

We therefore conclude that, notwithstanding the obvious differences (e.g., cause, culture, and scale), al Qaeda will, in at least some respects, evolve in ways similar to other terrorist organizations, particularly those that have also been subjected to extreme external pressure. We have therefore undertaken a more detailed review of these other organizations in order to provide significant pointers as to the likely future form and shape of al Qaeda. Studying such examples may also assist in the development of indicators and warnings for emerging terrorist threats.

## **OBJECTIVE**

The objective of this project is to identify, through a detailed re-examination of the adaptation and evolution of other significant terrorist groups, historical patterns of activity that might be mimicked by al Qaeda and other future terrorist groups. A secondary objective is to identify approaches to countering such groups that should be employed or avoided in the Global War Against Terrorism. Given the complexities, length and scale of the campaign waged by Irish Republican Terrorists against the British government, the Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA) has been the main focus of this review. In order to verify the findings of this analysis, we have also examined the Spanish terrorist group ETA. This analysis has been based on an extensive literature survey and on a series of interviews with key individuals who are knowledgeable of the development and evolution of these organizations. These individuals are not named, as their participation was only secured on the basis of non-attribution.

## **ORGANIZATION OF THE REPORT**

This report contains an examination of the PIRA that covers the emergence and evolution of that group along with lessons learned related to counter-terrorist measures taken against the group by the authorities. Where similarities exist that are worthy of note, this examination is combined with an analysis of the ETA. Each of these topics is covered in a chapter containing sections that discuss the various elements of the topic. For each element, the report contains a narrative summary of information collected, a bullet point list of those critical factors identified by the study team, and a section detailing key lessons learned by the various counterterrorism experts involved in the study. Where appropriate, the authors have also made limited direct comparison between either the PIRA and the ETA and al Qaeda.

## **II. EMERGENCE OF THE THREAT**

### **HISTORICAL CONTEXT**

If the most recent troubles in Northern Ireland have taught the British anything, it is that when a nation embarks on a War Against Terrorism it must fully understand the historical context of the crises in which it is going to become embroiled. It is clear from a review of literature and from interviews conducted for this study that when the British authorities directly intervened in Northern Ireland in 1969, they did so without an adequate appreciation of the long history of conflict in that troubled corner of the United Kingdom. In particular, there was a failure to appreciate how both the Catholic and Protestant communities in Ulster, and the Irish in the Republic of Ireland, viewed the Westminster government and British justice, impartiality and hegemony. As a result, the UK government failed to adequately anticipate how both communities—the majority moderate Nationalists and minority extremist Republicans on the one side, and the majority moderate Unionists and minority extremist Loyalists on the other—were going to react to the deployment of British troops and the imposition of rule from Westminster.

While the political situation and prevailing socioeconomic conditions at the time and subsequent actions by the authorities were the critical factors that influenced reactions across Ulster and beyond, so too was the legacy of earlier Crown interventions, dating back almost a thousand years. In particular, the underlying attitude of the Nationalist Catholic community towards the British was suspicious at best and confrontational at worst. The majority Protestant attitude towards the Nationalist community was similarly colored by ingrained attitudes derived largely from historically influenced enmities and perceptions. Although the IRA was slow to respond to the escalation of protest and violence in 1969, it eventually managed to manipulate this historical baggage, particularly after the British Army was provoked by both communities into a confrontation with the Nationalists and Republicans.

The overall British army attitude towards the Irish in general and the Catholic community in particular was all too often contemptuous and condescending, particularly among the officer class. While many individual members of the British army were appalled at the conditions they encountered when they deployed onto the streets of Derry and Belfast in 1969 and did much to build bridges with the Nationalists, once the honeymoon period ended and confrontation became the order of

the day, historical attitudes and prejudices resurfaced. Treating this community with contempt was hardly likely to foster a spirit of cooperation. Indeed, the attitude of some, particularly certain senior officers, contributed to the almost complete fracture of relations between the army and the Nationalist community. It took many years and a concerted effort on the part of the British authorities to reduce the impact these historically shaped attitudes had on community relations.

The legacy of this fractious history was not just limited to Ireland. The enmities, hatred, and bigotry that have resulted from Britain's fraught relationship with the Nationalists and Republicans were eventually exported to the United States and other Irish communities around the world. This helps explain why so many Irish Americans were and still are willing to support the IRA, even in the aftermath of September 11, 2001. Many Irish Americans carry with them not only their incomplete perceptions of the current troubles but also attitudes that were frozen in time at the point when their ancestors first emigrated to the United States and elsewhere. Even after significant positive changes had occurred "back home," these negative attitudes persisted and were easily exploited by the terrorists to gain support for their campaign. This historical discontinuity among immigrant communities is a constant and crucial factor that is further exaggerated by a common tendency among many expatriates to exaggerate their ethnic and/or religious identity.

In Spain, successive politicians have also failed to appreciate the power of history in defining the shape of the ongoing dispute with Basque nationalists and their demand for independence. The Basque people understandably make much of the fact that they are among the oldest homogeneous ethnic groupings in Europe and speak one of the oldest unadulterated languages in the world. Their history defines them as a people in a way that is hard to understand for those who do not share such a strong sense of belonging. It is also a history that is littered with a few real and many imagined examples of Spanish repression of the Basque people. Like so many other recent examples, including many Muslim immigrant communities, this history has created a sense of victimization and inferiority that undermines all efforts to achieve a peaceful resolution of this ongoing war.

### **Summary of Critical Factors—Historical Context**

- The British and to a lesser extent the Spanish failed to fully appreciate the historical context of the crises in which they became embroiled. To a certain extent this preconditioned their political response, which focused on the obvious immediate issues without also addressing legacy attitudes.

- The British and Spanish security forces were not immune to the negative effects of historical baggage and early biased attitudes were particularly counterproductive.
- The terrorists easily and effectively exploited the Basque and Catholic communities historically charged attitudes towards the Spanish and UK authorities respectively.
- The Irish experience has shown that the attitudes of immigrants towards the “old country” or at least the authorities of that country actually becomes frozen at the time of emigration and is eventually based more on mythology than fact.

## **Lessons Learned**

### **Historical Baggage**

In the current Global War Against Terrorism, the Coalition must avoid repeating the same mistake as the British and Spanish. When it becomes involved with a particular community, it must remember that a considerable amount of historical baggage will complicate the task. For example, community reaction to the Coalition may well be preconditioned by experiences of earlier interventions, especially from nations whose ethnic or religious background is similar to that of members of the Coalition. Sadly, history will more often than not influence how others perceive us. There is no doubt, for example, that the Crusades are still a powerful tool, exploited by some to drive a wedge between the Christian West and the Muslim world. An effective strategy to combat terrorism cannot be devised unless the historical context is fully understood.

### **Immigrant Communities**

Terrorist groups like al Qaeda will seek to elicit direct or indirect support from ethnically or religiously similar immigrant communities and use them as Trojan horses from which to strike at the homebase or national interests abroad. They will exploit any angle to achieve this goal including the historical dimension. The coalition has to be alert to this and deploy an effective information strategy aimed at each and every vulnerable immigrant community before it is too late. If the troubles in Northern Ireland have demonstrated anything, it is the fact that the war of ideas and the battle for hearts and minds must be a constant factor in the war against terrorism.

## **UNDERLYING CAUSES**

In developing our understanding of asymmetric threats, it is all too easy to become fixated on the ideology of a particular organization and on its stated aims and

objectives, rather than on the underlying conditions that facilitate its emergence. In reality, each new manifestation of terrorism materializes from a complex combination of ideologies, real or perceived grievances, and other more general socioeconomic factors such as persecution, a lack of representation and deprivation.

### **Irish Experience**

The catalyst for the reemergence of terrorism in Northern Ireland was the real and perceived oppression, discrimination, and injustice felt by the Catholic community, not a unifying Nationalist ideology. It is fair to say that by the late 1960s, the minority Catholic community endured what had arguably become an apartheid state. The majority Unionist community controlled Ulster's Parliament and locally elected bodies, doing so through a variety of undemocratic and illegal mechanisms. This control ensured that there was a significant level of discrimination in housing allocation and government-controlled job distribution. Given that Protestant Unionists also owned most businesses, this ensured that there was extensive Province-wide job discrimination. As a result, many Catholics were either unemployed or employed in poorly paid menial positions.

To compound these socioeconomic problems, the Unionist community also dominated the organizations of State control, the police (Royal Ulster Constabulary), and paramilitary units such as the "B" Specials. These organizations adopted an overly aggressive and biased approach to any Nationalist protest and had for some time been viewed by most Catholics as tools of State repression. As a result of this pervasive culture of discrimination, many Catholics felt democratically excluded, had no confidence in British justice, and felt powerless to achieve change through legitimate means. A sense of desperation and victimization was felt by many Catholics, by the more moderate majority Nationalist community, and by hard-line Republicans.

Against this background, there emerged in the middle 1960s a new generation of Catholics who had benefited from the introduction of "universal" education in Northern Ireland after World War Two (the 1948 Education Act). For the most part, these mostly high school-educated Catholics were far more aware of the plight of their community and had the skills necessary to articulate their anger and to organize effective protest, and had the means (jobs and income) to support that protest. As a result, a civil rights movement was born in Northern Ireland (the NICRA), spurred on by similar developments in the United States and Europe. Indeed, the success of the civil rights movement in the United States gave huge encouragement to Catholic activists.

The official response to this largely peaceful protest movement was immediate and entirely disproportionate. The Unionist community felt significantly threatened by Catholic demands for equal representation, equality, and security and responded to the protests and marches with aggressive police action and attacks by large vigilante gangs of hard-line Protestant Loyalists. By the summer of 1969, violent attacks on Catholics were commonplace and reports began to surface of Catholics being intimidated into leaving their homes. This inevitably led to riots and chaos.

On August 12, 1969, ferocious rioting broke out between Nationalists and the RUC in Derry that continued for days. In an effort to alleviate the pressure in Derry, Catholics were urged to riot elsewhere. By the end of several days of rioting, two Protestants and six Catholics were dead (most killed by the police) and the authorities had resorted to the use of tear gas, water cannons and armored cars firing .30 caliber heavy machine guns (one round killed a 9-year old Catholic boy 3 miles from the riots). The Province was rapidly descending into civil war and the Irish Prime Minister actually suggested that the South might intervene directly if the situation was not stabilized. It was into this turmoil that the British Army was deployed to restore order and effectively to protect the Nationalist community from both Loyalist gangs and the Northern Ireland State/administration.

Against this background, the British government slowly began to realize that the injustices that existed in Northern Ireland had to be redressed, and a wide range of reforms were eventually implemented. However, the government also came under immense political pressure to restore the rule of law and dismantle the barricades erected in most Catholic areas. This brought the Army into direct confrontation with the Nationalist community and its actions quickly came to be seen as synonymous with traditional Crown support for Unionism and repression of the Nationalist community.

What the British failed to appreciate was that every action taken is seen either as a victory or defeat in a divided community. Any concession made to the Nationalists was opposed by Unionists, whose only interest was in maintaining their own position of dominance, and any failure to redress centuries of real and perceived injustice was seen by Nationalists as continued appeasement of the Unionists.

An escalation of the troubles occurred long before the benefits of the British inspired and funded reforms could bear fruit. Sadly, there was no effective information campaign in place to buy the UK government the time it needed to see its reforms come to fruition. The UK government also failed to convince Nationalists of the sincerity of its motives. The case had to be made that the UK government had intervened to restore order and justice and not simply to maintain Unionist

dominance. That case was not made effectively. Out of this vacuum, a revitalized IRA emerged, presenting itself as “defender” of the Nationalist community, champion of Irish unity, and as the sword to end British “colonial” rule.

This was a critical juncture in the escalating troubles. The reason why the Nationalists were manning the barricades was to protect their community from real (Loyalist gangs) and perceived (police and army) threats, and the reason why the riots had occurred in the first place was because of the very real injustices endured by that community. Instead of resorting to force to restore law and order, the British subsequently realized (too late) that they should have made a concerted effort to engage in dialogue with the essentially nonviolent protest elements. Eventually it was realized that there is a subtle but important difference between those who become embroiled by default in violent protest and those who embrace political violence by design in order to achieve their goals. Lumping the two together inevitably drives the moderates into the arms of the extremists.

### **Summary of Critical Factors—Underlying Causes**

With regard to the conditions that can facilitate the emergence of a terrorist threat, the Northern Ireland and Basque experiences have shown the following:

- Terrorism rarely occurs simply as a result of some sort of spontaneous political or religious combustion. There are always diverse underlying factors that contribute to the emergence of a new terrorist threat. Understanding these factors is critical to understanding the motivations and rationale of the group itself and more importantly the community that provides the terrorists with support.
- Factors such as inequality, discrimination, political impotency, poverty and deprivation, a sense of injustice, and the resulting feelings of hopelessness create the social conditions that encourage the emergence or reinvigoration of terrorist groups.
- Within divided communities, there is no “middle way” for an intervening external power. All actions are seen either as a loss that must be reversed or a victory that must be consolidated.
- The physical and, more importantly, psychological benefits of reform and reconstruction can take months and even years to bear fruit and may be undermined by a deterioration of the security situation on the ground in the intervening period.



- The lack of an effective hearts and minds campaign was a key failing of early British and Spanish efforts to overcome ingrained attitudes and promote positive change.

## **Lessons Learned**

### **Root Causes**

All too often, the first time that politicians and the public become fully aware of a terrorist group is after it has conducted its first high-profile attacks. This group is then defined only by its ideology, objectives, and methods. In reality, almost every new manifestation of terrorism emerges from a distinct set of root causes that in most cases is remarkably similar to causes in many other examples. Thus, if we can identify these root causes within a particular community or society, it should be possible to predict the likely emergence of groups that will embrace political violence. We can then intervene to forestall this process or develop a strategy to combat the threat before it has had time to become fully established. At the very least, and if we cannot pre-empt, then by understating these underlying factors we can develop a counterterrorism strategy, including an effective information campaign, that takes full account of the multiple reasons why individuals are persuaded to join or support a terrorist group.

### **Muslim Similarities**

Of course, these root causes will vary between terrorist groups and will manifest themselves in different ways, but with political will, sufficient resources, and time we can identify, defuse, and contain them. In the context of al Qaeda, the motivations of many of its recruits are far more complex than simply a desire to achieve a utopian Muslim world guided exclusively by Sharia Law. As was the case in Ireland, Spain, and elsewhere, feelings of injustice, victimization, and hopelessness abound in the Muslim world as well as religious fundamentalism. This study has shown that ideological extremism, be it religious or nationalist, has particular appeal because it affords an outlet to express anger, frustration, and desperation and it offers the seductive prospect of a “utopian” future, whether in this life or the next.

### **The “Real Middle Way”**

The UK government discovered time and again in Northern Ireland that its actions were seen as going too far by one community or not far enough by another. Eventually, the British learned painfully that the real middle ground lies in being seen to adhere to an identifiable, albeit probably disputed, code of justice and conduct and in applying the same balanced and blind justice and values that the British claimed for themselves. When those laws were found to be inadequate, the answer was not to

break them but to democratically change them. In the current War Against Terrorism, we must therefore ensure that everything we do conforms to our own, ideally internationally accepted, code of conduct and legal system. We cannot promote our own form of liberal democracy then deny its protection and privileges to those we are seeking to convert. We must also realize that justice must be blind and that compromise or appeasement in the end will always fail. This means making very pragmatic assessments of gain or loss, taking risks, and managing the consequences.

### **Buying Time**

Even with the best of intentions, the UK government was unable to end injustice and discrimination in Ulster and deliver prosperity before the security situation had deteriorated to the point where a major terrorist campaign had already commenced and political options had become much more limited. This is a challenge that we already face in Iraq and are likely to face again in the future. It would certainly be helpful when planning an intervention operation to promise less and deliver more but the key will be an effective information strategy designed to win the war of ideas. This strategy should constantly and consistently seek to remind a target audience of our efforts to make positive improvements while countering adversary attempts to exploit likely slow progress in that regard. Our information campaign must also counter adversary efforts to create fear, anger, and confusion in order to undermine confidence in the authorities and the commitment needed to fight and win a long war.

## **ACCELERATING FACTORS**

### **Political Inertia or Retrenchment**

In addition to the underlying socioeconomic factors outlined above, a number of other factors can accelerate the transition to violence. The first accelerating factor the study team identified was a failure to prevent organized and largely peaceful civil rights protests from escalating into bloody riots. In Northern Ireland, the protest movement that emerged in the late 1960s embraced all elements of nationalist society and was effectively organized and representative of the feelings of that community. It was able to articulate the frustration nationalists felt at the pace of reform in Northern Ireland and effectively exploited the media to publicize their grievances. In contrast, the Unionist-dominated authorities were unwilling to listen to this protest; failed to understand the depth of feeling, anger, and frustration, and appeared interested only in maintaining the status quo. Their response was political inertia and a security crackdown. This combustible situation was further inflamed by the largely

unrestrained campaign of violence and intimidation initiated by the extreme end of the Protestant tradition typified by the Loyalists street gangs.

This response further hardened the attitudes of the Nationalist community and encouraged extremists within the civil rights movement to advocate a campaign of violent protest rather than passive resistance. In turn, the Unionists and Loyalists saw their privileged position threatened and responded even more aggressively. As a result, the spiral of violence worsened. Marches quickly degenerated into riots, which were then suppressed by a government security crackdown and by further attacks by Loyalist gangs. Eventually Nationalists, feeling assailed from all sides, began to barricade their communities in order to keep out both the authorities and the Loyalist gangs. As chaos ensued, the IRA sought to present itself as the only effective defenders of the Nationalist community and exploit the anger and bitterness in order to rekindle the Republican flame.

The ETA has also sought to exploit legitimate civil rights protests for its own ends. It has now created a civilian arm, which is tasked with orchestrating riots and other acts of civil disobedience partly in order to radicalize the Basque population and partly to provoke the Spanish authorities.

### **Disproportionate Response**

A closely linked and equally significant accelerating factor is a disproportionate response on the part of the authorities to civil disobedience and terrorist violence. At the outset of their respective troubles, both the Spanish and British governments engaged in counterterrorist campaigns that alienated many moderate Catholics and Basques, providing the IRA and ETA with more volunteers than they could handle and a community that was willing to directly support the group or at least “turn a blind eye” to its activities. ETA continued to benefit from this disproportionate response even after the demise of the Franco regime and the election of a democratic government. Indeed, Spanish terrorism experts suggest that the struggle against the ETA was set back 10 years because of the “dirty war” fought in the 1980s, which seriously damaged Spain’s reputation both in the Basque region and abroad. Israeli repression of the Palestinians has achieved a similar undesirable outcome, a fact that was highlighted recently in a joint statement issued by the last four heads of the Israeli internal intelligence service (Shin Bet).

### **Family and Community Tradition**

A third accelerating factor is the existence of a family tradition of involvement in an extremist or terrorist movement. Many of the members of groups such as the IRA, ETA, and Hamas have literally been radicalized at their parents’ knees and have

followed fathers, uncles, and brothers into the movement. By way of example, both the father and uncle of Gerry Adams were IRA men, and his wife also comes from a family with a long Republican tradition. The dominance of family is a great strength to the terrorist movement, until it is penetrated. Once the authorities have an informant operating within a group linked by familial associations, internal security is severely compromised, as most activities and members are well known to the bulk of the group. The cronyism usually associated with family-based organizations can be a double negative as it can foment jealousy not only in the wider movement but even worse among excluded relatives.

A wider tradition of violent protest within a community and/or the existence of a terrorist movement (perhaps largely dormant like the IRA in 1969) is also a factor that can accelerate the emergence of a serious asymmetric threat. For example, the newly formed Provisional IRA, drawing upon the tradition and limited resources of its earlier incarnation, was therefore able to present a large-scale threat within 2 years. Similarly, the al Qaeda network has benefited greatly from the combat experience its leaders gained while fighting the Russians in Afghanistan throughout the 1980s.

### **The Impact of Education**

Leaders from both traditions have linked improvements in secondary education directly to the upsurge in social awareness that occurred in Ireland in the 1960s. Education can enlighten, but that enlightenment will inevitably lead to an increase in social and political awareness, greater realization of injustice and discrimination, and raised expectations for the future. Initially, this social and political awareness manifests itself in the form of a well-organized civil rights movement. Unfortunately, the IRA was also able to exploit this increased awareness by suggesting that there was no justice from the “Brits” and by promoting themselves as defenders of the community and the only means to deal with the real or perceived grievances. Sadly, it does not always follow that improved education and social awareness lead to democratic expressions of dissent or a more tolerant society.

The radicalization of the young can also occur within the school system and at other points of social interaction such as sports and social clubs. For many years, Catholic and Protestant schools in Northern Ireland did little to discourage the divisions that existed between the two traditions; indeed some could fairly be accused of reinforcing ethnic hatred. This problem reportedly continues in many Basque schools, which teach a Basque nationalist agenda. The British response was to fundamentally change the education system in Northern Ireland, a process that took over a decade to complete. This change was a vital element of the overall campaign to break the link between the terrorist and the community.

Improved education also played a key part in the revitalization of the IRA. The early leaders of the newly formed Provisional IRA had not enjoyed the benefits of universal education. However, the young radicals they recruited into the organization in the late 1960s had and it clearly showed. Emergent leaders such as Gerry Adams were far more capable than their mentors. They were able to effectively promote and update the cause, inspire and motivate their supporters, and plan a strategic campaign in ways that less well-educated men could not. Gerry Adams in particular went to great lengths to ensure that there was an intellectual foundation to the movement's ideology.

### **Extremist Clerics**

The activities of certain Catholic and Protestant clerics also significantly exacerbated the situation in Northern Ireland in the early and middle stages of the troubles, providing a religious legitimacy to what was essentially a nationalist dispute. The incitement to violence by certain members of the clergy proved to be particularly difficult to counter, wrapped up as it was in biblical references and religious mysticism. These clerics offered the terrorists divine justification for their actions and absolution for the horrors they committed. They also presided over the funerals of terrorists killed in action, effectively conferring upon them the status of martyrs. It was only when the senior leaders of both traditions, including the Pope himself, came off the fence and unequivocally condemned the use of violence that the negative impact of this accelerating factor began to be mitigated. However, even with this high-level condemnation communities still took the word of their local clerics at face value until such time as these clerics were themselves condemned by the faith and removed.

### **The Media**

Another significant accelerating factor is media exposure of real and perceived grievances and extensive coverage of protests and violence. Such coverage, which can often be biased and without context, can inform, but it also can inflame animosity and polarization. In both Northern Ireland and the Basque region, particularly during the early stages, there were numerous examples of media reporting on conflict in one area provoking outbursts of violence elsewhere. There is also hard evidence that the media sometimes has unwittingly been manipulated in order to provide media coverage of terrorist incidents. For example, the IRA would instigate a minor terrorist event in order to draw the media into an area ahead of a major terrorist operation. That said, stories of media complicity and provocation are exceptionally isolated and limited to "renegade" journalists. Both the IRA and the ETA have also produced their own media "content" which they have released to media networks or have shown to

their own supporters. For example, the IRA has produced video footage of weapons training and of high profile attacks including the shooting down of a British Army helicopter.

UK and Spanish government attempts to control the media were largely counterproductive even before the arrival of global media coverage. Far more effective were efforts to develop an effective information strategy; the implementation of policies that avoided Security Force overreaction, the reporting of which would inflame tensions or assist the terrorist; and the education and training of all security force personnel to deal with the media effectively. This included the creation of incident response teams that included operationally credible public information personnel. Efforts to remind the media of their responsibilities in such situations were also very effective. In time, the news spotlight switched to the terrorists, who became the more newsworthy of the two sides. Even Republicans have been known to recoil at media reporting of atrocities—not usually out of remorse but because of the damage it has done to the cause.

In the late 1980s, the UK government introduced a media ban on the political wing of the IRA (Sinn Fein). In 2002, the Spanish government imposed a similar ban on the political wings of the ETA (Batasuna). Both bans were attempts to deny the terrorists what former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher called the “oxygen of publicity.” The popular perception is that the Sinn Fein ban was largely ineffective and had, by the end, become a subject of derision. During this study, however, a number of senior Nationalist politicians have opined that this ban was highly effective. In their view, the ban created an information vacuum that they as democratic politicians were able to fill. The ban also broke the “spell” that certain leaders of the IRA held over the Nationalist community, significantly eroding the climate of fear that existed in that community. The IRA, like many terrorist groups, is based on charismatic leadership and the ban limited Sinn Fein leaders like Gerry Adams to local meetings as the only way of promoting their personality and agenda. In recent years, the UK government has actively encouraged the integration of Sinn Fein into the political process so the ban had to end, but Nationalist leaders expressed the view that the ban bought them the time they needed to reestablish themselves with the electorate.

The Spanish government has chosen to exclude the political arm of the ETA from the political process and instead has developed a dialogue with Basque Nationalist groups that do not advocate violence. Perhaps the most mature aspect of the Spanish strategy is tolerance of parties that promote a separatist agenda as long as those parties advocate the achievement of this goal via democratic means. The

Batasuna media ban is therefore a vital part of this strategy. Spanish officials do however caution against a blanket media ban without an effective information strategy already in place to fill the vacuum created. In order to counter the media ban, the ETA has sought to exploit the Internet in order to publicize its demands and to show recordings of terrorist activities. This medium is largely beyond the control of the Spanish authorities and it has yet to be determined what impact this approach will have.

### **Decelerating Factors**

In contrast to the experiences of the IRA and ETA, it is worth reviewing the emergence of anarchist groups such as the Baader Mienhof Gang and the Red Brigades in Europe in the early 1970s. These groups adopted an extreme Marxist Leninism ideology that was not embraced by even a small proportion of the general population in Germany or Italy. These groups also emerged in societies that were stable, democratic, and affluent. By and large, the authorities did not instigate illegal or disproportionate measures to counter these organizations, so there was no groundswell of sympathetic support for either. Indeed, as these groups grew more extreme, what little support they did enjoy began to melt away. As a result, these groups were unable to recruit sufficient members to replace those that had been killed or arrested. By the late 1980s, an attritional law enforcement campaign had essentially ended the threat posed by these groups. The obvious conclusion is that the absence of underlying causes and accelerating factors denied these groups the legitimacy and support they needed to survive.

### **Summary of Critical Factors—Accelerating Factors**

- Civil rights campaigns that degenerate into civil disobedience and violent protest can accelerate the emergence or reemergence of terrorist groups.
- A disproportionate response by the authorities can bring short-term security and political gains but usually means more support and more terrorists in the longer term.
- It is certain that terrorists will continue to seek to provoke a disproportionate response because it has been proven to work to their benefit so often in the past.
- A family tradition of violent protest is a significant accelerating factor that ensures a steady stream of willing radicalized young recruits to the cause.

- A community tradition of violent protest and/or the existence of earlier terrorist movements can assist emerging groups to rapidly reach a higher level of competency.
- Improvements in education often provide the intellectual stimulus needed to encourage the creation of civil rights movements, organized civil disobedience, and eventually even political violence.
- Schools and other places of social interaction that teach extremism also facilitate the emergence of terrorist groups and help sustain recruitment.
- Fundamentalist clergy that preach an extremist agenda and provide religious and moral legitimacy to the terrorist have a seriously destabilizing influence that must be countered and discredited—ideally by the faith they purport to represent.
- Extensive media exposure can inflame attitudes, polarize opinion, and encourage further protest and even violence. Terrorists will actively seek to exploit the media for their own ends.
- The only way to “manage” the media is to avoid if at all possible actions that generate negative coverage, develop and implement an effective information strategy that seizes and retains the news initiative, and provide all personnel with appropriate media training.
- There can be merit in instigating a media ban on the political advocates and apologists of terrorist movements but only as part of a wider political and information strategy.

## **Lessons Learned**

### **Disproportionate Response**

In the early 1970s, a PIRA chief of staff stated that the best recruiting sergeant the Republicans had was the British army. This was no idle boast and it is fair to say that the actions of the army and police in the period between 1969 and 1979 were sometimes disproportionate, indiscriminate and beyond both UK and international law. This strategy was mimicked by the Spanish authorities, which waged what became known as “dirty war” against ETA during the 1980s. As a result, large numbers of otherwise moderate Irish Nationalists and Basques were radicalized to the point that they were then willing to join or support the IRA or the ETA. This is a vital lesson that we must learn and a topic to which we will return. Suffice to say, any action that reinforces a community’s sense of victimisation, discrimination, and insecurity is likely to increase support for a terrorist group, not reduce it. Indeed, such



actions are likely to be ruthlessly exploited by the terrorists to promote their own agenda and to justify their violent actions.

### **Education**

The impact of education can be both positive and negative. In Northern Ireland and Spain, the emergence of an educated and socially aware generation able to identify and articulate grievances and recognize injustice was a significant catalyst for activism and protest. However, by failing to convince this newly educated populace that they would be part of an inclusive political system, activism led to organized civil disobedience and ultimately to political violence rather than to democratic expressions of protest. Such experiences have also shown that formal and informal education systems can be exploited to promote and reinforce historical enmities, extremism, and feelings of betrayal, injustice, and discrimination. We must therefore counter attempts to exploit education to radicalize the young whenever and wherever we can. However, we must also accept that parents have a right to demand an education for their children and that in some communities schools that promote an extremist agenda are the only source of that education. In the context of Islamic terrorist groups, this means that we must deal with the disruptive and potentially destructive effect of some Madrassas while at the same time providing an adequate replacement for the general education such schools provide.

### **Religion**

Even in conflicts that are not religiously motivated, religion can be a powerful force for good or evil. Extremist clerics can provide the terrorist with a god-given legitimacy and divine justification for acts of violence. Such appeals to a higher authority must be effectively countered both by banning or arresting clerics who incite violence and by encouraging leaders of a particular faith to speak out and condemn such activities. In the absence of such support we must develop an intimate understanding of the tenets of such faiths in order to compete effectively in the war of ideas with extremists who distort religion for their own ends.

### **The Media**

Attempts to manipulate the media are not only unconstitutional; they are largely counterproductive and trying to persuade independent media to give equal coverage to the Establishment agenda is an unattainable dream. Our first objective must simply be to reduce and ideally eliminate bad press. The British and Spanish eventually learned that they had to avoid policies and tactics that could generate short-term political or security gains but that more often than not provided the terrorists with numerous opportunities to exploit negative media coverage and reinforce hostile perceptions within the communities on which they relied. The

reaction of Irish Americans to the negative images they saw in the early 1970s took many years to overcome, and support for the IRA did not collapse until after September 11, 2001. However, with very little to report other than positive developments, the media automatically turn the glare of publicity on the terrorists to their detriment.

The second lesson is to develop an effective information strategy that is proactive rather than reactive. Terrorists cannot be allowed to dominate the news agenda. If an incident occurs, media teams must be the first on the ground and the first out with a factual story, even if that story means admitting that mistakes have been made. In World War Two, the Allies learned that the best way to counter German propaganda was to be the first out with the bad news but to then set that bad news into context. In Ulster, that might mean admitting quickly that a civilian had been accidentally shot in a firefight but then highlighting the other facts—that the first shots had been fired by the terrorists and that they had been hiding in a civilian home. Issuing statements such as the “matter is under investigation” simply allows the news headlines to be dominated by the terrorists’ version of events, by inevitably inaccurate and often biased eyewitness reporting, or by media comment based on interviews conducted in the chaotic first minutes after an event has occurred. By the time the “real story” is finally released, the perception battle has already been lost. This requires significant authority to be delegated to commanders and/or public relations officers because the observe, orientate, decide and act (OODA) loop in the 24-hour media age is counted in minutes, not hours. If higher approval has to be sought, the initiative is probably already lost.

A third lesson is that every asset deployed to combat terrorism must be aware of its role in the information campaign and adequately prepared to play an appropriate part. The attitude, behavior and pronouncements of every soldier and official can have a bearing on the success of a campaign. All personnel must therefore understand the strategic impact their individual actions can have and be adequately trained to deal with the media.

Another important element of this strategy is setting achievable goals. Experience has shown that we are unlikely to encourage hostile communities to like us, to joyously accept our intervention, or even to want what we want. In the end, all that is needed is for a community to withdraw its support for the terrorists, to offer a grudging acknowledgment of the necessity to restore law and order, and to show a willingness to pursue nonviolent methods of achieving its objectives. An information strategy must reflect this reality.

The lesson that can be learned from media bans is that this tactic can be effective but only when deployed as part of a wider information campaign that allows other expressions of protest to be heard, even if these views are opposed to our own. The bottom line is that aggrieved communities must have outlets for their anger and vehicles to express their opposition. As long as they do not promote or encourage violence these voices must be tolerated. Media bans must also be used precisely and not as a blunt instrument.

### **Dealing with the Clerics**

It is clear that clerics who advocate violence and provide terrorists with apparent divine authority and absolution have to be dealt with at an early stage. This requires a proactive campaign aimed at persuading moderate religious leaders to speak out against violence using the “scripture” to reinforce the message. When done successfully, this approach can have a significant positive effect—literally taking God out of the equation. However, local clerics can still ignore the pronouncements of senior clergy and continue to preach jihad, intolerance, and division. In such cases it is necessary to demand as sensitively as possible and with some community support if feasible—that the church or mosque expel these clerics and perhaps even order their detention. The anger such actions may generate will dissipate in time; however, left unchecked, the damage done by extremist clerics can be incalculable.

### **Human Factors**

Another common theme in this study is the importance of understanding the complex mix of human factors that motivate individuals to join or support a terrorist organization. Even those individuals who are ideologically the most committed are also driven by emotions and experiences that reinforce their belief structure. Such factors can occasionally be manipulated to persuade certain individuals to turn against the organization and work for the authorities, even in groups where the punishment for being an informer is torture and death. An adequate human factors analysis capability must therefore be developed to exploit the human condition thereby circumventing the group ideology.

### **Democracy can Prevail**

It has often been said that democratic societies are the most vulnerable to terrorism, yet the British and Spanish experiences have shown that when both countries acted outside of their own and internationally accepted standards of behavior they were at greatest risk. Conversely, when they acted within suitably amended domestic law and were able to secure international support for their actions, the greatest successes were achieved and the terrorists most threatened. This is a hard lesson to learn in our current War Against Terrorism and means taking greater risks in

the short to medium term. On occasion, highly aggressive direct action is required and justified in order to eliminate or contain an imminent threat, but this must be the exception to the rule. All the evidence suggests that applying double standards will lose vital domestic and international support and will be expertly exploited by the terrorists to legitimize their actions and further alienate the community from which they draw vital support.

## **EMERGENCE OF THE THREAT—SUMMARY**

The recently published United States National Strategy for Combating Terrorism recommends undertaking actions that are designed to defeat the terrorist network, deny it operating space, diminish the underlying causes of terrorism, and win a war of ideas. Had this holistic approach been applied in Ireland in the period 1969–71 and the following measures taken, this war could have been won much more quickly:

- In the first instance, the authorities needed to have a much more intimate understanding of the complexities of the developing situation, which may have had both contemporary and historical dimensions.
- It should have been obvious at the time (given all the indicators that were present) that the key to avoiding an escalation of violence was the resolution of root causes of concerns to the Nationalist community. The grievances of the terrorist can rarely be resolved, but the community that provides the terrorist with moral and logistical support can be won away from violence if its issues are addressed effectively.
- The Unionist-dominated authorities in the North and, to a lesser extent Westminster needed to demonstrate a willingness to listen to the complaints of the Nationalist community and to understand their motivations—to introduce an inclusive political system. They also needed to show that they were prepared to act decisively to deal with legitimate grievances.
- The authorities needed to develop effective channels to talk with the moderate leaders of the Nationalist community. Many suitable channels did exist but bias, prejudice, and cultural/historical ignorance blinded the authorities to many of the possibilities.
- Given that it may become necessary to develop a dialogue with a terrorist group, it is important to determine who within the group should be approached.

- It was vital for the authorities to restore confidence in the system quickly by dealing boldly and publicly with even the most contentious issues, thereby negating (in most eyes) the need to resort to violence.
- In its efforts to restore the rule of law, the authorities should have avoided acting outside established ethical and legal boundaries in order to avoid aggravating and exaggerating the sense of injustice, victimization and exclusion already felt by many in the Nationalist and Basque communities.
- The benefits of addressing key issues even decisively took months and even years to materialize. It was therefore essential that the authorities implemented an effective “Hearts and Minds” campaign in order to buy the time needed to deliver positive results. Sadly, the UK’s efforts in this regard were ineffectual in the early stages and easily undermined by the IRA’s much more effective PSYOPS campaign.
- The authorities needed to show more tolerance for public expressions of Nationalist anger, frustration and grievances in order to defuse the hostility that existed.
- Efforts to undermine the “divine” legitimacy of the terrorist by arresting extremist clerics and persuading the church to condemn the IRA were to pay dividends in the longer term.
- Democracies are not weak and they can prevail when they operate within the rule of law and accepted standards of behavior.
- Diminishing underlying causes and staying within the law are vital parts of the War Against Terrorism. That said it is essential that the authorities hold the ring against the terrorist, by maintaining effective control and upholding law and order in order to buy the time for the other strands of the strategy to succeed. If the terrorists are able to cross a certain threshold of violence, then the pressure for decisive offensive action may become so great that the war of ideas is suspended and efforts to diminish underlying causes are stalled or undermined. However occasionally deadly force is justified to remove a major threat or to send a short sharp message to the terrorists. The key is to use force precisely and not as the default setting.



### **III. EVOLUTION OF THE THREAT**

#### **REEMERGENCE OF THE IRA**

Against a background of civil rights protest and often-violent confrontation between Nationalists on one side and the authorities and Loyalist gangs on the other, the IRA failed to fulfill its “sworn” duty to defend the Catholic Nationalist community. Indeed, as Catholic communities burned in August 1969, some even suggested that the IRA actually stood for “I Ran Away.” To add insult to injury, it was the British army and not the IRA that deployed to protect the Nationalist community as law and order broke down in Northern Ireland in the fall of 1969. This situation came about because by 1969 the IRA was dominated by leaders, based in Eire, who espoused a Marxist-Leninist political approach rather than supporting the Armed Struggle. These leaders had come to prominence following the defeat of the IRA in the “Border War” that ended in 1962. As a result of this military defeat, the long-held policy of abstention (from the political process and Crown authority) was rejected and a predominately political campaign was embraced. The military wing became largely dormant, little training was undertaken, and arms caches dwindled. As a result, in the fall of 1969 the IRA was not in a position to rally its remaining volunteers even to defend Catholic communities then under attack.

There were, however, a number of senior IRA figures in Northern Ireland who had always opposed this political approach and they continued to advocate abstention and the armed struggle. These leaders were incensed at the IRA’s failure to defend Catholics in the ghettos of Belfast and Derry, claiming that the southern-based leadership was out of touch. They also realized that the social conditions in the North were right to rekindle the Republican flame. They therefore moved quickly to displace the old leadership, formed the new Provisional IRA (PIRA), and recommenced the Armed Struggle against the British Crown. What remained of the old IRA was restyled the Official IRA, which continued over many years to carry out a more limited terrorist campaign. It was the Provisionals, however, who were to dominate the war in Northern Ireland.

The PIRA’s strategy was simple:

- To mobilize the Republican movement and the wider Nationalist community to defend itself against both the Protestant mobs and the British authorities.

- To provoke the authorities into overreacting and thereby drive the Nationalist community into the open arms of the IRA.
- To resume (once the movement had been reinvigorated) the armed struggle in order to secure their primary aim—a united Ireland.

The ETA differed in its evolution but embraced a broadly similar strategy.

## **IDEOLOGICAL UNDERPINNING**

As discussed earlier, a vital element of a successful counterterrorism campaign is a clear understanding of the ideological underpinning of each terrorist group. All too often, such an understanding is superficial and focuses on the most obvious motivating factor(s). For example, the situation in Northern Ireland is often defined in religious terms. In reality, the ideology of the IRA was and is nationalism and the main aim of the group has always been the unification of Ireland. Religion is indeed a divisive factor in Irish politics but most certainly was not the catalyst for the reemergence of the IRA in 1969-70, as some believe, other than to historically describe or demarcate the groups who held opposing political positions. Certain members of the IRA also adopted a Marxist-Leninist political ideology but, again, this was not a critical factor that either defined this group or guided its terrorist campaign. In fact, the Provisional IRA was formed mainly by volunteers from the North, who chose to break away from the Marxist Southern Irish-dominated Official IRA.

The popular impression of the motivations of the ETA is similarly superficial. In contrast to the IRA, this group is not only motivated by deep-seated nationalism and an abiding hatred of the “occupying state.” It is also defined by its extreme Marxist-Leninist political ideology. The ETA therefore seeks the creation of an independent Socialist Basque State that eventually would encompass the Basque regions of both Spain and France. The political orientation of that unified state would most definitely be Marxist in nature. In recent years, the ETA has also extended its ideological base to include anti-globalization, although this has as much to do with political expediency as the ETA’s long-held anticapitalist sympathies.

Both groups fanatically adhere to their absolutist goals, which probably could not be achieved in the form desired by either group and certainly not via the armed struggle. In this respect, both groups are similar to al Qaeda with its absolutist Muslim ideology and all have had or still do have dreams of a utopian future. It would certainly appear that the leadership of Sinn Fein and the IRA have long recognized that a strategy based on the armed struggle alone would ultimately fail and they have adapted and modified their strategy to include initially a “ballot box and bomb” strategy and ultimately a politically dominated approach, albeit one



underpinned by the retention of a “military” capability. However, despite this quasi-democratic approach, the absolutist goal of a unified Ireland remains undiminished, at least among hard-core supporters.

Given this similarity, it is worth noting that PIRA support within the wider Nationalist community has waned over the last few years. This community is probably still motivated by dreams of a united Ireland; however, the struggle has become increasingly irrelevant to the real lives of most Nationalists. The political system in Northern Ireland is now fully inclusive (at the most recent elections Sinn Fein became the largest Nationalist/Republican party), most Catholics are now relatively prosperous, schools have been depoliticized, religious fervor has diminished, and international tolerance of and support for the PIRA has been greatly reduced in the post-September 11, 2001 world. As a result, most Nationalists who actually care are probably prepared to see a united Ireland achieved through democratic means and not via the armed struggle. This probably explains the upsurge in Sinn Fein support as much as anything.

At the outset the PIRA and the ETA embraced the armed struggle as the primary means of achieving their goals and objectives. However, very early in their campaign the PIRA under Gerry Adams recognized that military force was merely a means to an end and should not actually become the end. To a lesser extent, the ETA also realized the value of a political strategy and formed Batasuna as a result. Within both groups the armed struggle did become the core tenet of a small hard-line faction, even more than nationalism or Marxism. In this respect there are similarities with Muslim terrorist groups who are equally defined by their commitment to jihad. However, these Jihadists were and are a minority in both groups.

The study team believes that both Sinn Fein and the IRA are now simply parts of the same whole, under a single leadership that will do whatever is necessary with any means necessary to achieve the ultimate aim of a united Ireland. The threat or use of violence would only be employed now to secure further concessions; the main thrust of the campaign would remain political. That said, experience suggests that a small minority of PIRA hard-liners will return to full-scale violence if and when the political path fails to yield the absolutist goals they seek. Some would argue that the Major and Blair governments have capitulated to the terrorists and already made far too many concessions without the PIRA actually ending the war or giving up all of its weapons. The British government would probably dispute this, arguing that by offering an alternative democratic route for Republicans to achieve their aims they have removed the threat of terrorism (although not defeated it) from Ulster.

Similarly, many senior Spanish officials would argue that a terrorist group can never be appeased and cannot therefore be included in the political process. They're hope is to achieve a compromise with other Basque Separatist entities. This does however run the risk of leaving ETA with no alternative but to increase the level of violence in order to be "heard".

Another key aspect of the ideological underpinning of both the IRA and ETA is their representation of themselves as the defenders of their community. Given that both the Basques and the Irish Republicans/Nationalists already perceived themselves as being victimized, repressed, and discriminated against, this characterization played to a receptive audience. It is fair to say that this particular motivating factor was probably the most significant in Northern Ireland in 1969, with most young men and women rallying to the "colors" in order to defend their community, *not* to achieve a united Ireland. However, these individuals were easily persuaded to join the ranks of the IRA, and eventually a smaller number embraced the wider Republican ideology. Martin McGuinness is perhaps the most well known of this cadre.

Nationalist ideology was undoubtedly a primary motivating and unifying force that led to the formation of the PIRA, as was the struggle for, and exploitation of, the civil rights movement. That said religion did still play an important part in the reemergence of the group. Many members of the newly created Provisional IRA were devout Catholics who took great strength from their faith. A number of the parish priests who ministered to this Republican community shared hard-line sentiments similar to those of the PIRA volunteers themselves. The tacit and sometimes explicit support of these clerics provided volunteers with encouragement, justification, and absolution. More generally, religion was one of the primary causes of division in Northern Ireland, and the PIRA was particularly adept at manipulating mistrust and conflict between the two traditions for its own ends. Their ability to define an essentially political conflict in religious terms also helped them to secure wider community support. Only the eventual unequivocal condemnation of violence by senior clergy and the expulsion of "renegades" undermined this appeal to faith.

The commitment of the vast majority of terrorists to the cause was as absolute as the cause itself, at least in the early stages of the war. Nevertheless, both the UK and Spanish governments (and the Israelis) have had considerable success in "turning" individuals, including some very senior leaders, for a variety of very human reasons (guilt, remorse, greed, revenge, fear, sexual indiscretions, etc.). It is therefore clear that human factors play a significant role in motivating individual terrorists and supporters. (This theme will be explored further in a subsequent section on terrorist motivation).

### **Summary of Critical Factors—Ideology**

- It is vital to fully understand all of the unifying ideological motivations of each terrorist group. They may be more complex than is readily apparent.
- At the outset, most nationalist and/or religiously inspired groups have absolutist goals that can probably never be achieved in the form desired and certainly not by strategy based solely on the armed struggle.
- The PIRA experience suggests that wider community support for absolutist aims can be undermined if root causes are addressed and the war of ideas is won.
- At the outset most groups embrace the armed struggle as the only or primary means of achieving their objectives, although the most successful groups like the PIRA recognized early that a dual track strategy would likely yield great benefits.
- For a small minority, the armed struggle, or jihad, can become their defining precept. Unless the group can restrain these individuals, they almost certainly must be eliminated either by the authorities or, surprisingly, by the group itself.
- Even within terrorist groups that have embraced the political dimension as their primary strategic direction, the leadership has not unreservedly renounced the armed struggle. The danger therefore remains that the group, or at least splinter elements of it will continue or return to violence if the political approach fails to achieve their absolutist aims.
- In Northern Ireland, and to a lesser extent in the Basque region, the principal motivating factor for joining a terrorist movement can be the desire to defend one's community against real or perceived oppression, rather than the unifying ideology of the group in question. This can be exacerbated by the anger generated as the result of a disproportionate response from the authorities.
- Even in a group whose ideology does not center largely on a religion, the impact of extremist clerics can still be significant, providing members with divine authority, justification, and forgiveness for any act. Only condemnation by the leaders of a faith is likely to break this link.
- Terrorists are motivated by human factors as well as ideology and underlying causes.

## **Lessons Learned**

### **Understand the Adversary**

In order to defeat terrorists, it is not enough to simply “know” them. Security forces must also intimately understand what motivates them, why they do what they do, and why a wider community is willing to provide direct and indirect support. It is all too easy to define a group by an obvious single ideology and not get at its true nature or the depth of support for the various ideological motivations, not only within the group but also in the wider community from which it draws its support, tacit or otherwise.

### **Wage a War of Ideas**

Once the ideological motivations of any group are known and understood, then an effective war of ideas can be mounted against that group. The main aims are to persuade the wider community to withdraw its support from the terrorists, to encourage that community to reject the concept of the armed struggle, and to motivate the terrorists to seek alternative democratic means of achieving their goals and objectives.

### **Target Ideas of the Supporting Community, Not the Terrorists**

Experience suggests that a long-term strategy for winning the war of ideas can ultimately succeed, but only when directed against the wider community from which the terrorist group draws its support. There is little evidence that a war of ideas will persuade many members of the group itself to give up their perceived struggle.

### **Provide Alternatives to Terrorism**

A significant number of those who joined the IRA—and to a lesser extent the ETA—in the early days did so to defend their community or cause. In itself, this is an honorable motivation. It is therefore essential to devise strategies for persuading these essentially decent people that there are alternative avenues for them to pursue. This strategy should also be aimed at reducing their sense of insecurity and fear of security forces. Otherwise, yet again, the terrorist will find a ready source of idealistic recruits who can then be indoctrinated.

## **INDIVIDUAL MOTIVATIONS**

All too often, an understanding of the terrorist mindset is unduly influenced by the actions of the group and feelings of anger, revulsion, and an understandable desire for justice/retribution. This was certainly the case with regard to the British understanding of the typical IRA volunteer in early 1970s. As a result, initial efforts to get inside the mindset of the terrorist were largely unsuccessful. It is an age-old

truism that one has to walk in someone's shoes before one can fully understand who that person is and why they do what they do. Only after a more dispassionate understanding of the terrorist mindset was developed did the British security forces begin to successfully penetrate the movement, cultivating human sources and implementing an effective hearts and minds campaign. Following are the main motivations of the typical IRA terrorist as identified by the British Army.

### **Ideology**

The IRA entered the current conflict with a hard core of supporters and operatives whose main motivation was no different from that of their ancestors—the withdrawal of the Crown and the creation of a united Ireland. While the southern—based leadership may have embraced a political approach in 1962, many in the north held the firm belief that the Republican cause would only succeed through abstention and a return to the armed struggle. This type of absolutist cause had particular appeal to the many young people in the Nationalist community who had little hope in their lives.

### **Tradition**

The Republican tradition has literally been handed down from father to son and daughter and even today, some 30 years later, family/tribal allegiance to the cause continues to fill the ranks of the IRA. Gerry Adams is typical: his father, grandfather, and several uncles were leading Republicans and he married into a family with a similar tradition and pedigree.

### **Desperation**

Many of those who joined the IRA from 1968 onward were not from Republican families. The discrimination experienced by most Catholics in the 1960s had created a large Catholic underclass of angry, bored, and impoverished young men and women who were easily persuaded that a campaign of activism and civil disobedience was the only way to improve their lot, not least because few Nationalists believed that there was any alternative expression for their anger and frustration. As far as they were concerned, the exclusive nature of the “system” denied them both basic rights and a democratic voice. A common theme from the interviews conducted with this generation was the sense of hopelessness, despair, and betrayal (by the system) that they all felt. The attitude of so many Nationalists was not that dissimilar from that of many Palestinians today: “when one has nothing, one has nothing to lose.” When seen from this perspective it is a short walk to groups like the IRA, Hizbollah, and Hamas, which appear inclusive and offer the dream of a utopian future.

## **Anger**

The authorities' draconian and violent crackdown on the civil rights movement, combined with its failure to control the Loyalist mobs, further radicalized many Nationalists. The early aggressive response of the British Army, along with flawed UK policies such as internment, further alienated this Nationalist community and provided the IRA with a large pool of willing recruits who were motivated by feelings of anger and a desire for revenge.

## **Self-Defense**

Another theme from interviews was the feeling that it was one's duty to join the IRA to defend one's community and cause from the threats it faced. This is a powerful emotion that was ruthlessly exploited by the IRA. Many of those who joined the IRA in the early days appear to have been motivated far more by this essentially honorable desire than by any broader Republican aspirations or advocacy of an armed struggle. The majority of those motivated by this desire eventually left the movement, but a significant minority were efficiently indoctrinated and inducted into the IRA.

## **Religious Extremism**

Religion did not define the IRA and did not motivate the majority of Catholics to join the group, but it did provide a bedrock of devotion and tradition that benefited the IRA, enabling it to use the power of the parish priest to maintain control of the community in which it operated. These clerics also provided divine justification and absolution for terrorist acts. The religious dimension was also used to exaggerate the preexisting division that existed between the two traditions in order to further inflame ethnic hatred and rivalry.

## **Youthful Exuberance**

One further dimension should not be underestimated as a factor for joining a terrorist movement—the idealism, recklessness, and exuberance of the young. Many under the age of 25 were caught up in the excitement and romanticism of the armed struggle and were easy prey for terrorist recruiters. This was particularly true in the poor working class areas of Belfast and Derry, where mass unemployment and boredom had already created a disillusioned young underclass who actively sought external dangerous stimuli such as joy riding.

## **Group Dependence**

A motivating factor to remain in a terrorist group, if not join it, is group dependence and reinforcement. Once a volunteer has joined, he or she becomes

almost totally isolated from normal society, and the group's grievances and prejudices are reinforced and psychological interdependencies are created. A collective mindset also emerges that reinforces their shared ideology. The group becomes the only source of information, the only source of confirmation, and in the face of external danger the only source of security. A sense of "regimental spirit" is also created, so that "not letting anyone down" becomes a powerful driver. This was demonstrated during the IRA hunger strikes, when "staying the course" and not "letting down those who had already died" became as important as the actual reasons for the strikes. In such circumstances, defection from the group is a destructive act for oneself and one's friends and cannot be contemplated. Terrorist leaders of course encourage this group dependency, although Human Intelligence (HUMINT) operators can also exploit it. In such cases, the agent handlers can replace the group as the source of information, security, and confirmation for an informant.

### **Summary of Critical Factors—Individual Motivations**

Despite the odious nature of the acts they would later commit, the study team believes the vast majority of people who joined the IRA and ETA did so for what they and their community deemed the most honorable of reasons. These individuals and their extended families did not view themselves as "murdering cowards" but as "patriots," "soldiers," and "freedom fighters." Given this abiding belief in the legitimacy of their cause and of their actions, it is necessary to demonstrate an in-depth understanding of their motivations, occasional grudging respect for their cause and deeds, and sometimes even apparent empathy in order to convince individual terrorists or supporters to inform, reform, or negotiate.

It took many years but this distasteful reality eventually dawned on most political and security force leaders in the UK and Spain. One very senior Unionist politician known for his hard-line views told the study team that while he despised the IRA's methods, politics, and religion he did understand the "misguided dignity of their struggle." He also stated that he felt that "the vast majority of terrorists and Republican sympathizers offered their allegiance or support to the IRA for reasons no different from those that would motivate any one of us to defend our own cause or community." More insightful members of the British army who served in Ulster during the early 1970s shared this attitude. Once exposed to the realities on the ground they expressed the opinion that "had they been Catholics they too would have joined the IRA."

## **Lessons Learned**

### **Understand Terrorist's Complex Motivations**

Very few ETA and IRA terrorists or supporters gave their allegiance to the cause because of a single motivating factor. Developing an understanding of all motivating factors allowed a war of ideas to be waged against these groups. Developing techniques to determine the unique combination of factors that motivates individuals to join or support either group also allowed the authorities to chip away at the resolve of the group, one volunteer or sympathizer at a time. Knowing what buttons to press is also a critical element of a HUMINT campaign against a terrorist movement.

### **Steel Counterterrorism Agents to be Able to Engage the Terrorist**

Despite the horrified reaction to the atrocities the terrorist commits, bitter experience has shown that allowing feelings of revulsion, anger, and despair to determine our strategy for defeating the terrorists will be counterproductive. Turning terrorists and, more importantly, decreasing the level of community support and the flow of recruits requires a deep understanding and the appearance of respect at least for the causes and grievances the terrorists purport to represent. A willingness to listen and take seriously the real and perceived grievances of an aggrieved community is also essential. This requires a significant degree of maturity and realism on the part of the authorities, and a certain degree of desensitization of those engaged in combating terrorism. Discussions with those who have been at the sharp end of informant recruitment and handling have shown that no matter how distasteful this approach may be it is the only way to secure agents and community cooperation and trust.

## **ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE**

Having determined to act, the IRA reactivated the quasi-military structure it had adopted many years previously. The original Republican Army (the name most often used by Republicans) was formed in 1913 as an army to fight for independence from Britain. Many of its members had military experience, and it was therefore entirely logical that the organization would adopt the model its members knew best—the titles, structure, and trappings of the British Army. Even after partition in 1921, the IRA continued the fight in the North and retained its quasi-military structure. The new Provisional IRA was built on this historical precedent and on the dormant military structure that existed prior to 1970.

The PIRA reactivated an organizational structure that comprised companies, battalions, and brigades, and eventually commands (Northern Command covering



Ulster and Southern Command based in the Republic of Ireland). This mimicked the British model with which the IRA was most familiar. In addition to the regular PIRA staffed by full-time volunteers, an Auxiliary PIRA (part-time force) was formed, as well as Local Defense Committees. This was a formalized organization for supporters who did not take part in operations but who could be rallied to defend communities under attack—a Republican “National Guard.” The IRA, like many other terrorist groups, assumed with some justification that a quasi-military structure was the most effective way to raise a large resistance movement. It allowed them to rapidly expand from an organization with few active volunteers to an “army” that numbered its operatives in the hundreds and its active supporters in the thousands. A quasi-military structure also afforded some degree of unifying and empowering characteristics which were essential when trying to raise, train, equip, quarter, and operate a force in enemy territory.

It is wrong, however, to assume—just because the PIRA and to a lesser extent the ETA adopted a quasi-military structure—that these groups conformed to a standard table of organization and equipment (TO&E). The organization of each and every unit of both groups was subtly or fundamentally different from all others because of several key factors. Most terrorist groups are personality and “tribally” driven and each unit is therefore very much a reflection of the personality of the leader and/or of the family or “tribe” from which most members are recruited. Units raised in Belfast were substantially different from those raised in Derry, and both were different from units raised in rural areas such as South Armagh. Equally, the unit commanded by a young charismatic leader like Bobby Sands differed considerably from the units commanded by the more mature and pragmatic “Slab” Murphy. Unit structures were also resource driven: a company in one area might have 40 active members and another might have fewer than 10. Some units were raised for specific operations and functions, and these would differ from those raised to conduct varied operations in a specific locality. This is almost certainly how al Qaeda cells and the insurgents in Iraq and Afghanistan are organized. Expecting to find patterns in such “chaotic” groups can be a futile exercise.

In addition to exploiting the real and perceived operational benefits of adopting a quasi-military identity, the PIRA correctly sought to appeal to the egos of many terrorists, who see themselves as “soldiers” engaged in a “war” against the “authorities,” not as terrorists. Being an “army” also bestows upon them a sense of “legitimacy,” which they use to explain and justify their “military” campaign. It is also “sexy” to see oneself as a member of an army, and the PIRA used this positive image as an effective recruiting tool. All of the trappings of military service were adopted, including a formal rank structure, oath of allegiance, uniforms, code of

conduct, courts-martial system, awards and decorations, POW system for captured volunteers, and military-style funerals for those killed in action.

A quasi-military structure is not without its disadvantages, however. It is more observable, easier to understand, and vulnerable to penetration. The IRA organization structure therefore changed over time to a cellular and highly compartmentalized network. It did however retain much of the early organizational terminology for the sake of familiarity, legitimacy, and a degree of false fronting. Even today, for example, the group of cells that comprise the subnetwork based in Derry is usually referred to as the “Derry Brigade.” This new cellular structure proved to be exceptionally robust, and extensive security force penetration of the organization did not undermine its overall capacity to survive and function.

As described earlier, there is no standard structure for these cells, known as Active Service Units (ASU) by the PIRA. They are all to a certain extent shaped by the personality of the leader and/or the resources available. That said most PIRA ASUs were intended to conform to the plan devised by Gerry Adams, although the ASU structure did evolve over time. Initially the goal was for each team to comprise around four or five specialists (from a combination that might include a QM, a sniper, an explosives officer, and an Intel officer). These cells were usually to be given free reign within a specific geographic area. The reality was more blurred and most cells rarely had the complement or mix of skills desired.

The exception to this was the specialist operational teams, or “Spec Ops” teams, formed to conduct specific types of operations or a certain function. Usually formed at the “brigade” level, Spec Ops teams were created, for example, to deploy Vehicle Borne Improvised Explosive Devices (VBIED) or carry out “shoots” with a prestige weapon against a suitable target anywhere within the brigade’s area of responsibility. In the early 1990s, such a cell was formed to conduct sniping attacks on security forces personnel using a newly acquired 14.5mm rifle. This team only conducted sniper operations and was unknown to most others within the PIRA. As a result, the team was able to remain at large for some time, killing 7 soldiers before they were eventually captured. As this organizational structure was refined, such teams would be “formed up” from a pool of manpower many unknown to each other, for a specific operation and then “stood down” afterwards in order to defeat detection and penetration.

Changes in the organizational structure resulted not just from security force successes but also to preempt perceived changes in security force strategy and tactics. As the terrorists became more experienced and “professional”, they took a much more professional interest in the enemy and would model or “war game” British approaches

and activities in order to take develop preemptive counters or eliminate vulnerabilities.

Contact with other cells and “higher command” usually occurred only through the cell leaders. Most cells were eventually grouped together under a territorially based subnetwork covering an urban or rural area, e.g., Belfast or Tyrone. Inevitably there would be some contacts among volunteers within a subnetwork but the more security-conscious leaders usually minimized these. Interestingly, those cells or subnetworks led by “charismatic” leaders were often far more vulnerable than those led by leaders who embraced the principle of devolved authority (a terrorist version of Mission Command) and who imposed an effective (sometimes obsessive) level of operational security.

The self-imposed isolation of the cellular structure took time to take effect, as many of those involved in the IRA and ETA were well known to each other and the wider community. But, as new recruits joined the group and attrition removed compromised members, security improved significantly. Still, close family and community links within the cell were commonplace and, even today, remain a weakness that can be exploited.

Both the IRA and ETA also formed functional commands and departments tasked with providing essential combat and service support. Such departments included logistics, intelligence, engineering (to produce improvised explosives and weapons), training, recruitment, internal security, and finance. However, even within these functional groupings a significant degree of lateral and vertical separation was maintained for security reasons. The functional area with the most connectivity was the logistics, or Quarter Master, organization. These individuals often knew most other QMs, other functional leaders, several subnetwork commanders, and some members of the Army Council. Penetration of the QM network can therefore pay dividends.

In response to this vulnerability, the ETA appears to be undergoing further reorganization. While functional commands have continued, the Spanish government is now aware that some cells that require no external support are being established. These self-financed cells store and maintain their own weapons and equipment and conduct their own operational planning and intelligence collection. They may also undertake their own recruitment. Links with higher leadership are kept to an absolute minimum; more senior ETA commanders only offer strategic direction. Autonomous cells would be exceptionally difficult to detect although their effectiveness may be limited by a lack of access to group resources and the need to maintain and support the cell as well as fight.

## **Summary of Critical Factors—Organizational Structure**

- Both the IRA and ETA adopted a quasi-military organizational structure, not only because of tradition, but also because when nothing else is known this structure is the most obvious to adopt to prosecute a military-style campaign.
- At the outset of a campaign, the adoption of a military structure offers significant advantages to a terrorist group, including providing the framework for rapid expansion and the militarization of a community.
- By assuming the paraphernalia of an “army,” the terrorist group seeks to legitimize itself and exploit the positive image of military service for recruitment purposes.
- While groups may utilize a typical military organizational structure (e.g., brigades, battalions, and companies) and associated terminology, there is no standard TOE in a terrorist movement—all units are different from each other in terms of structure, numbers, and tactics.
- The structure of a terrorist group is influenced at all levels by the personality of its leaders, family and/or ethnic background, resources (principally manpower), and role or function.
- Most terrorist groups quickly learn that the quasi-military structure is far too easy to observe, penetrate, and interdict. Moreover, it presents government security forces with an adversary with whom they are most familiar and best equipped to defeat.
- Both the IRA and the ETA quickly adopted a compartmentalized cellular structure with substantial lateral and hierarchical separation.
- Most cells were originally established with a range of specialists in order to conduct a wide range of small-scale operations within a given geographical area. Later, specialist cells (Spec op cells) were established to conduct a specific type of attack, one usually requiring more advanced skills. Functional cells have also been established to cover tasks such as intelligence gathering and internal security.
- A cellular network is exceptionally difficult to penetrate, and even groups that have suffered informers at all levels have managed to survive relatively intact although certainly diminished.
- Once a cell has been penetrated, the close family and community links that usually exist can be exploited in order to roll up the cell and often the subnetwork as well.

- Experience has shown that cells and subnetworks that are led by charismatic leaders who cultivate cult-like loyalties are more vulnerable than those led by leaders who practice devolved command and enforce lateral separation.
- Specialist cells are usually formed for one-off operations (e.g., “spectaculars”), for specific types of operations (sniper teams), and for operations conducted abroad. Links between such cells and the group are minimal and most usually report directly to “supreme” leaders. Risk of compromise is therefore significantly reduced.
- Larger terrorists groups like the IRA and ETA also establish functional commands to provide essential combat and service support. Functional departments include intelligence, engineering, logistics, internal security, training and indoctrination, recruitment and finance.
- The most vulnerable functional department is the Quarter Master chain, which must maintain links with cells, subnetworks, most other functional areas (e.g., intelligence, engineering, and finance) and senior leadership.
- To reduce QM vulnerability, the ETA may be creating fully autonomous cells that are able to function with little or no external support.

## **Lessons Learned**

### **Exploit the Quasi-Military Organizational Structure**

Having adopted a quasi-military structure, most groups are vulnerable to government security force measures, and an aggressive counterterrorist strategy can do serious damage to groups organized in this way. However, as a result of their failure, some groups quickly realize that they must adopt a compartmentalized cellular structure in order to survive. If such a structure can be fully established, the chances of success for a strategy based solely on counterterrorism are greatly diminished. In the future, emerging groups are likely to adopt a cellular structure from the outset.

### **Cultivate Vulnerabilities**

For some time after adopting a cellular structure, terrorist groups remain vulnerable to penetration, as many members are well known to each other even if they end up in different cells. Strong family and community ties, which can be exploited, also persist within individual cells and subnetworks. Recruiting informants at this time will pay dividends because as new members join the cells, established links will ‘rust-out’ or break. The tactic of forming cells for specific tasks and then standing them down does, however, make the task of detecting and penetrating them much more difficult.

### **Follow the Logistics Trail**

Efforts devoted to the detection and surveillance of terrorist Quarter Masters and arms caches can yield disproportionate benefits. These individuals have contacts throughout a group or subnetwork, and their recruitment or the observation of their activities can lead to the identification of cells and key personalities. Weapons and other equipment can also be observed or manipulated in order to follow the terrorist's trail.

### **Combat the Next Evolution**

Before groups can adopt a compartmentalized, or worse an autonomous cell structure, it must be deeply penetrated and community support diminished. Otherwise, it may become exceptionally difficult to counter such a threat. Erosion of community support is probably the key to success against such a difficult target, as even autonomous cells need places to hide and some active supporters, as well as new recruits. Someone always knows something; at the very least family members are likely to be aware of an individual's connections. Winning the trust or at least cooperation of a community is likely to be the surest way of finding and co-opting the person "in the know."

## **TERRORIST LEADERSHIP**

### **Three-Generation Theory**

The Study Team believes at least two and possibly three distinct generations of leadership are typical in a large terrorist movement. These generations are likely to emerge sequentially, but they may all end up in positions of power at the same time. The study team has designated them as follows: first generation "early leaders;" second generation "follow-on" and "continuity" leaders;" and "third generation embryonic leaders." Early leaders are those individuals who formed/established and led a terrorist group during the first period of its existence. In the case of the Provisional IRA, this would have been the period between 1969 and around 1975, and for the ETA from the late 1950s until the early 1980s. In the context of al Qaeda, Osama Bin Laden would fit into this category. It should be remembered that some early leaders remain in positions of authority after follow-on leaders have started to emerge and even after they have taken charge.

Follow-on leaders are those individuals who replace or share power with early leaders after the group has been operating for some time. They are usually much younger, even more committed/devout and more capable, although they usually share similar social backgrounds and many of the same motivations and traits as the early leaders. There is, however, a distinct transition between these two generations.

Follow-on leaders fundamentally redefine and reorganize the movement, taking it in a new strategic direction. In the case of the IRA, this process of leadership transition began as early as 1972, as attrition and disagreement over strategy began to take its toll on the early leaders. In Spain, this process only accelerated in the 1980s when the ETA became much more active. It is entirely possible, however, that some early leaders may accept the new strategic direction of the organization and remain in positions of power and authority. Many follow-on leaders joined the movement when it was formed or were recruited by the early leaders. The first of these follow-on leaders to emerge (e.g., Gerry Adams) may themselves remain in control of their respective organizations for many years.

Within the PIRA over time a new subcategory of leaders which the study team has designated “continuity leaders” began to emerge. Continuity leaders share essentially the same ideology, background, motivations, and traits as the remaining follow-on leaders and may well have been groomed by them for leadership roles. They are likely to be supporters of the remaining follow-on leaders and owe their status and allegiance to their mentors. For that reason they are unlikely to radically change the structure or strategic direction of the organization. They are generally happy to maintain the status quo and are willing to continue to steer the movement in broadly the same direction as the remaining, usually more senior, follow-on leaders like Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness. For these reasons it is assessed that follow-on leaders and continuity leaders are both second generation.

Third generation “embryonic” leaders are defined as individuals who do not fit the profile of most or all previous leaders. They are young and highly motivated and are likely to modify or expand the “cause,” change the goals and objectives of the movement, reorganize and restructure, and adopt a new strategic direction.

### **Early Leaders—The PIRA**

Not unlike al Qaeda, with its links to the Afghanistan war, the early leaders of the new Provisional IRA were already experienced terrorists, most of whom had been bloodied in the failed Border Campaign, which ended in 1962. These “hard men” from Northern Ireland had watched in frustration and anger as the southern-based leadership adopted a Marxist-Leninist political approach that rejected the principles of abstention and the armed struggle. The events of 1969 further inflamed their passions, and the failure of the IRA to adequately defend the Nationalist community stiffened their determination to break from the current leadership and re-launch the fight, at least in the North. In this respect their reputation, and in most cases their long family tradition, were vital factors ensuring the success of their succession. They had credibility both as leaders and fighters and had earned the respect of many

IRA men in Northern Ireland. Individuals such as MacStiofain, O Bradaigh, O Conail, and McKee dominated the newly created Provisional Army Council, with MacStiofain (an Englishman who had joined the Republican movement in the 1950s) becoming its first chief of staff.

This new leadership was mature, in their thirties and forties, and they came from broadly similar working class backgrounds. While few could be described as well educated, most were intelligent and all were street-smart. To varying degrees, they understood the dynamics of the socioeconomic and political activism of the time and correctly recognized that it afforded them an opportunity to reignite the armed struggle. MacStiofain, in particular, was able to think strategically and he drew up a plan that attempted to shape more than simply a day-to-day war. His strategy was three-pronged: first, to promote the IRA as defenders of the people; second, to retaliate against those responsible for the violence and discrimination, in order to provoke a disproportionate reaction; and third, to escalate the armed struggle in order to “eject the Brits.”

While none of these leaders were particularly charismatic, they did command respect, thanks to their established reputation as seasoned veterans and in some cases their personal efforts to defend Nationalists against the Loyalist mobs. It also helped that they were perceived as men of integrity, given that they had remained ideologically committed to the armed struggle and abstention when many others had not. Their reputation as ruthless killers also ensured that they were feared. By exploiting this respect and fear they developed a persona that allowed them to persuade most IRA volunteers to switch to the breakaway Provisionals. They were also able to motivate many young Catholics to join the IRA in 1969 and 1970. Without an established reputation and the respect it garnered, it is doubtful that these leaders could have carried the support of the bulk of the IRA. In this respect, leaders like MacStiofain stand comparison with the first leaders of al Qaeda.

### **Early Leaders—the ETA**

The early leaders of the ETA were not as experienced as their PIRA counterparts, although a few much older members did have some combat experience from the Spanish Civil War. What they did have was a long track record of activism and support for the separatist and Marxist ideologies of the group. In that sense, they too had an established reputation and were therefore able to command the respect and/or fear within the group and the wider Basque community. Some could also be described as charismatic, and they used their ability to inspire the movement and to motivate and recruit dedicated followers. These followers often showed even greater zeal and commitment to the cause, again mirroring the PIRA experience. As a



politically motivated movement, these early leaders were generally better educated than their IRA counterparts. However, as the ETA had to operate within a repressive right wing state until the late 1970s and were therefore much more operationally constrained, it is hard to judge whether the higher level of education had any impact on operational effectiveness.

### **Follow-on Leaders—The IRA**

Inspired to join the PIRA with those early leaders were a large number of much younger men, some of whom would eventually become successful commanders and leaders in their own right, including one Gerry Adams. This cadre included individuals with an established Republican background who were further radicalized by their experiences in 1968-69. It did not take much to persuade these individuals to join the PIRA given that they had been indoctrinated from a very early age. Many were of good intellect and all had at least a high school education. Few went on to university, mainly because they chose to join the PIRA instead. At the same time, an even larger group joined the PIRA, inspired not by any Republican ideology but by a desire to defend their community; by anger resulting from the overreaction of authorities; and, for a few, by a thirst for revenge. The resolve of many of this intake quickly melted away, but a substantial hard core was persuaded to become full-time “volunteers.” From this cadre emerged leaders such as Martin McGuinness and Bobby Sands. Both intakes were far more sophisticated in their understanding of the dynamics of the crises and the opportunities it presented than were the early leaders of the PIRA. This was due in no small part to the impact of universal education.

These follow-on leaders very quickly had the opportunity to demonstrate their prowess and bravery as “fighters” and/or their cunning and guile as strategists, as the campaign of violence escalated. By 1972, the number of terrorist operations could be numbered in the thousands. Martin McGuinness, for example, rose from “street punk” to commander of the Derry Brigade in less than 5 years and had become chief of staff of the PIRA by 1978. In the process, he demonstrated his willingness to take significant risks, his capabilities as a commander, and his ruthlessness as a terrorist. He therefore earned the respect of his men “in the trenches” and had the credibility as a “fighter” that Gerry Adams never quite achieved. As a result, he built up a cult following that has never waned, even after he joined Sinn Fein and embraced the peace process. Indeed it could be argued that it was his acceptance of the peace process that won over many skeptical volunteers and junior commanders.

Gerry Adams’ own rise to the leadership of the PIRA was similarly spectacular. However, his emergence was due more to his abilities to manipulate the organization and as a strategist rather than as a fighter. Although there is some

circumstantial evidence that he personally took part in operations, his “war record” has been largely exaggerated. This lack of “street cred” might have prevented Adams from leading the PIRA were it not for the fact that his chief ally has long been Martin McGuinness and other veteran fighters. Adams could never have persuaded the IRA to adopt the “long war” strategy and the “bullet and ballot box” approach without the support of seasoned and respected field commanders like McGuinness.

These much younger men, mostly in their early twenties, were far more dedicated than the early leaders and were prepared to fight on when the older leaders sought to develop a political dimension to the struggle. This is somewhat ironic given that Gerry Adams himself eventually developed his own “dual-track” approach. Despite their relative youth, they had strength and clarity of purpose as well as flexibility of mind and the ability to think laterally. All believed that “the ends justify the means” and each had a considerable degree of moral flexibility. Very few ever showed genuine remorse for their victims, only for the “bad press” and resulting damage some atrocities did to their cause. The only limiting factor that these individuals placed on the level of violence used was the damage that excessive casualties might do to the cause.

The chief success of this follow-on leadership was their ability to accommodate both the “military” men, who were predominantly driven by a belief in the militaristic route, and strategic thinkers who viewed violence as an arrow in the quiver and who sought to bend its use in order to facilitate the transition to other strategies. In Belfast in the early 1970’s the thinker Adams partnered with military men like Ivor Bell to form the ideal combination needed to take control of that Brigade. This approach was echoed at each level of Adams’ leadership and reached its fulfillment in his relationship with Martin McGuinness.

The rise of these ‘follow-on leaders was rapid, facilitated in no small part by the success of the UK government’s counterterrorist effort, which eliminated a considerable number of the early leaders. It is somewhat ironic that far more dangerous leaders emerged as a direct result of the success of the UK’s counterterrorism strategy. It is clear, therefore, that a strategy that focuses on senior leadership and does not also include their many able followers runs the risk of missing emergent leaders.

The successful follow-on leaders like Adams were usually able to keep one step ahead of the authorities either by remaining in hiding or by avoiding any action that could directly link them to a terrorist offense. Like mafia leaders many were/are well known to the authorities but they are exceptionally difficult to convict. These leaders were also able to correctly read or engineer opinion within the movement and

“on the streets” in order to time and direct their leadership moves. As part of this manipulation they saw utility in provoking police and Protestant overreaction in order to establish cause and legitimacy, and to further radicalize the people. Splits also allowed both early and follow-on leaders to take control. The split between the Provisionals and the Officials saw the emergence of MacStiofain and the like. The later very violent split between the Provisionals and the more radical Irish National Liberation Army allowed Adams to consolidate his hold over the PIRA.

This follow-on leadership, which had effectively taken control of the PIRA before the end of the 1970s, remains in control to this day. They are able to inspire respect and fear in equal measure and are quite ruthless. From interviews conducted in Northern Ireland and from personal operational experience, the study team has developed the distinct impression that these leaders would certainly conduct an operation of mass destruction and kill thousands if they felt it would further their cause. The fact that they have not done so is simply because they have conducted a cynical cost-benefit analysis. An example of the ruthlessness of these leaders occurred in the early 1990s. At that time, PIRA leaders approved the tactic of holding a family hostage and threatening them with death unless the father cooperated in his own death and that of others. Basically, he would be strapped into a car full of explosives and ordered to drive to a target where the car was exploded with him inside. If he attempted to leave the vehicle, a booby trap exploded. Effectively this was proxy suicide bombing. Despite huge public outrage, this tactic was not withdrawn until the Republican community itself began to express not remorse but concern at the negative publicity being generated.

These leaders were almost all utterly dedicated to the ideology of the Republican cause and have never wavered from it. They may have embraced a dual-track approach, but there seems little doubt that their long-term objective remains a united Ireland by whatever means necessary. It is also the view of some members of the study team that this leadership, despite advancing age, would threaten or indeed order a return to the armed struggle at the very least in order to extract further concessions and enhance their political campaign toward their desired end-state. How long they are prepared to give the peace process before doing so is the \$64,000 question.

Based on this experience, and in the context of al Qaeda, it is possible to conclude that the emergent leadership of that network will be drawn from those young hard-core followers personally recruited by Osama Bin Laden and other senior leaders during the 1990s. At the present time, many of these potential leaders are probably commanding cells abroad or remain close to one of the senior leadership. The great

concern is that, if they follow the IRA pattern, they will be even more dedicated, ruthless, and capable than the current leadership and much more secretive and therefore even more difficult to find. By dint of their dedication, commitment, and “combat record,” they too will be able to exploit the Cult of Personality to motivate the organization and inspire its members to risk or give their lives for the cause. They may also recognize the value of a dual-track approach to their campaign.

### **Follow-on Leaders—The ETA**

There was a long period from the emergence of the ETA in the late 1950s until the escalation of the campaign after the death of Franco. The repressive Franco regime was, to a large extent, able to “keep a lid on” the activities of the ETA but at great cost in the long term as many more Basques were radicalized by their experiences. Leaders came and went, but a hard core of the early leadership remained in control of the organization while emergent leaders rose through the ranks and eventually replaced them. However, once the ETA campaign moved into high gear, as the democratic process matured in Spain during the early 1980s, increasing numbers of ETA leaders were killed or arrested. A much younger leadership emerged to replace them.

Like the PIRA, these follow-on leaders were much younger and even more dedicated than the older leadership that had led the organization for over 20 years. Many came from families and communities with a long tradition of Basque nationalism and the more recent Socialist ideology. Almost every individual recruited to ETA from the early 1980s onward had been further radicalized by the “dirty war” fought during that decade by a democratic Spanish government. This campaign, which included wrongful arrest and imprisonment, torture, and even assassination, further alienated most Basques, who were increasingly willing to either support the ETA or at least “turn a blind eye” to their activities. Perhaps the most significant aspect of the “dirty war” was the untold damage it did to the international reputation of the Spanish authorities especially in France. As a result, ETA leaders were able to hide within the French Basque population with little fear of arrest.

### **Third Generation Leaders—The ETA**

The Spanish authorities significantly improved their strategy for combating terrorism in the 1990s, with renewed emphasis on legitimacy and proportionality. This helped them to undermine support for the ETA in the Basque region, effectively countered ETA operations, and significantly improved international cooperation, especially with the French. As a result, attrition of the follow-on leadership accelerated, forcing the ETA to turn to a new generation of very young and inexperienced leaders who were given command of largely autonomous cells. These

new leaders were drawn both from blue-collar communities and from the more traditional educated middle class.

The Spanish assess that many of these new leaders were not as competent as previous generations and did not initially have the charisma and influence needed to inspire respect and motivate new recruits. As a result, the effectiveness of the ETA diminished for some time. However, the flow of volunteers willing to assume leadership roles has not been stopped, mainly because there remains a hard core of Basque separatists who are willing to continue the armed struggle until an independent Marxist Basque state has been created. Recent evidence suggests that this possible third generation of leaders has begun to exert more control over the movement and has shown a willingness to adopt new approaches. They have, for example, embraced the anti-globalization cause in order to broaden their appeal and they have encouraged street protests and riots in an attempt to foment a Basque Intifada.

### **Third Generation Leaders—The IRA**

Since the Good Friday agreement in 1997, the PIRA has suspended its combat operations although it continues to recruit, train, and equip its forces. If the Spanish experience provides any insight, the PIRA will be using this cease-fire to collect intelligence, to enhance its capabilities, and to develop new tactics. Its leadership is almost certainly developing a new military strategy to be employed if and when the peace process fails. That leadership has now been in charge of the PIRA, largely unchanged, for over 20 years. Since 1997, few if any have been arrested and none have been killed. Indeed, many jailed leaders have been released as part of the peace process, and some are bound to have resumed their “duties” despite the terms of the peace agreement.

That is not to say that a potential third generation has not emerged in the wider Republican movement. Rather than swelling the ranks of the PIRA, however, these junior and middle ranking leaders have been attracted to Sinn Fein, probably because this is the most publicly active division at present. Many are middle class and well educated (up to and including graduate level). They appear to be equally committed to the Republican cause and are both highly intelligent and cunning. Having advanced within the ranks of Sinn Fein, they have proved themselves highly adept at fund raising, campaigning, and organizing a constituency. If Gerry Adams’ strategy succeeds and the bulk of his aims are achieved via democratic means, it is likely that these potential leaders are only ever likely to emerge as leaders of Sinn Fein and not the military wing of the movement the PIRA. If the peace process breaks down, however, it is conceivable that at least a minority of this potential third generation will

become terrorists themselves. If they do, they may well prove to be the most dangerous and capable leaders yet. Within the limitations of the law, it is therefore vital that this potential third generation is monitored and profiled in case the peace process does ever break down.

### **Motivations, Traits, and Ambitions**

Like all other aspects of a terrorist/irregular group, the motivations of its members and leadership are multifaceted. The study team has determined that motivations differ little among early, follow-on, continuity, and third generation leaders. For a few, the driving motivation may be singular but in most cases its usually multifaceted and complex. The most common single motivating factors are either the “the cause” or a perceived need to “defend one’s community.” More usually, however, leaders are motivated by a combination of these and other factors. These can include hatred of the authorities, another community, or a different religious tradition and revenge for real or perceived offenses including the death or arrest of family members by the authorities.

Like leaders in most other areas of human endeavor, many terrorist leaders are driven by a strong desire for power and the status accorded to those in positions of authority. For a few, the lack of any alternative way of life drove them into the organization but was not a significant factor in their leadership aspirations. The buzz and intellectual challenge of terrorist violence is however a strong draw, and a minority actually develop a fondness for violence. In some cases, terrorism can be likened to a family business, with all the rivalries normal within and between families, with command literally passing from father to son or at least to another extended family member. Only a tiny minority of terrorist leaders have been principally motivated by money, as this is not a “business” in which the “management” gets rich unless of course the group evolves into a criminal gang, which some have.

Terrorist leaders share many of the same personality traits as most other volunteers. Additional traits found in terrorist leaders can include charisma (e.g., Gerry Adams) or stoicism (Martin McGuinness); excessive suspiciousness of everyone, including friends and family; self-defensiveness, including an inability to accept criticism, and confusingly, either exceptional cautiousness and patience or undue recklessness and impatience. Quite a few show narcissistic tendencies, combined with a need or desire to surround themselves with like-minded individuals who are in awe of or are bound to them. Another trait found at all levels is moral flexibility and the ability to rationalize acts of violence and distance oneself from any blame—“the ends justify the means.”

## **Leadership Strengths and Weaknesses**

Once a terrorist or insurgent leader has emerged as the best suited to lead, control of the cell or group is based most often on a “Cult of Personality.” Such status is derived from a combination of factors: strength of personality; respect, usually earned by deeds or association; family/tribal loyalty or fealty; and patronage. A leadership style based on a Cult of Personality has both strengths and weaknesses. Strengths include the potential for greater natural/unquestioning obedience than would be the case in conventional organizations. The cult status of the leader usually ensures greater loyalty from supporters/followers, which reduces the risk of compromise through informants. The devotion of these followers also allows the leader to ask more of his subordinates, including risking or giving their lives for him as well as the cause. It also allows a leader greater flexibility to manipulate the organization in order to gain promotion and position and promote supporters.

A leadership style based on Cult of Personality also has significant weaknesses, which can undermine the organization and/or be exploited by the authorities. In the first instance, a leader may attain cult status because of skill in only one area, not because he is best suited to command. Being a successful cell leader, conducting a low-level bombing and shooting campaign in a suburb of Belfast, does not necessarily a good senior commander make. Cult leaders are also open to challenge by emergent cult leaders who may seek to directly usurp authority or who may orchestrate a split in the group. The emergence of rivals often results from petty jealousies, ambition, or in response to perceived slights. Cult status also encourages an excessive belief in one's own or the leader's infallibility and blinds the group to the realities of the leader's failings. ‘Cult status’ may also preclude consideration of others' ideas or concerns either because they run counter to the thoughts of the leader or because the person offering them is not in the clique. Such cliques can also lead to diminished discipline within the clique and to cronyism, which results in the promotion of often-unsuitable supporters to the exclusion of everyone else. Cronyism will further exaggerate the rivalries and jealousies already created by the cult status of the leader. It is the paradox of terrorist leadership that the Cult of Personality is both its greatest strength and greatest weakness.

The very necessary obsession with security can also have a negative impact on effective leadership. The extreme need for secrecy may actually inhibit the best/widest consideration of a plan or strategy, confining a leader to a very small circle of trusted associates. Reliance on this inner cabal is likely to leave a leader isolated (possibly from reality), emotionally stretched, and vulnerable. In addition to concerns about external threats, the paranoia that usually results from fear of rival

leaders can also exaggerate security concerns and encourage increased isolation. The authorities can exploit these security concerns to undermine confidence and lower morale.

### **Leadership Style**

There is no common style of leadership in a terrorist movement. The most successful leaders combine a number of styles to best effect. Leaders do, however, fall into distinct categories. Early leaders usually inspire respect through the strength of their personality, their commitment to the cause, and their success as tactical commanders. They are the ideological focus of the group, its public face, and its military commanders. This of course exposes them to capture or worse.

Follow-on leaders usually fall into two different categories. First, there are those who have demonstrated their suitability for command by participating in and eventually leading successful operations. As word of their exploits spreads, they gain the respect and support of the volunteers. These individuals tend to have sound operational credentials and rule through reputation, success, fear, and strength of character. Martin McGuinness would definitely fall into this category. Then there are those who have charismatic personalities and the strategic vision necessary to inspire members and build a powerful constituency within the group despite having little or no operational experience. They also have the intellect to plan and lead a multifaceted campaign and the political skills needed to manipulate the organization in order to engineer their own rise to prominence. They are also accomplished “spin doctors” who can publicly promote themselves and the movement, goad the authorities and manipulate the media.

All of these leaders use a combination of carrot and stick, patronage and punishment in order to control the group. Supporters are raised to key posts to ensure that a leader’s plans are implemented and as a reward for loyalty. However, failure, indiscretion, or insubordination is punished ruthlessly. All these leaders are well aware that fear is a proven and powerful tool in irregular forces both to deter challenge and to maintain order. There is plenty of circumstantial evidence, for example, that the leadership of the PIRA have used violence—severe beatings, “knee-capping,” and even execution—to maintain “good order and discipline.” Of particular note is the ability of certain leaders to keep both supporters and rivals constantly off balance through intended inconsistency in their leadership style. Maintaining an element of doubt and fear in the minds of even loyal supporters is a particularly effective way of keeping them “honest.”



Successful terrorist leaders have also shown their ability to modify their leadership style as necessitated by external circumstances and the prevalent mood of the organization. The leadership of both the PIRA and the ETA have occasionally shown an apparent willingness to listen to supporters and the wider movement but then switched to a dictatorial style in order to drive through a new policy or a change in strategy. When necessary, they have also shown the ability to switch between a centralized command and control structure to maintain tight control, for example, during cease-fires, and a structure which devolves significant command responsibility to subordinates in order to preserve the security of the organization during conflict.

Another aspect of leadership style common to most terrorist groups is a tendency to rely on a very small group of trusted advisers. These advisers are allowed to act for the leader at some levels of the organization, communicating ideas and canvassing responses. Indeed, sometimes these advisers float new concepts as their own in case they receive a negative response from the membership. Gerry Adams has been particularly adept at selecting advisers he can trust and who can provide him with useful advice. These have been drawn from both the military wing and from Sinn Féin. The danger of course, in a system based on the Cult of Personality is that these advisers will tell the leader what he wants to hear rather than what he needs to hear. They were also able to exert undue influence on the leader. This of course can be an advantage for government security forces if exploited intelligently.

### **Determining Leadership Success and Failure**

Success reinforces the longevity and power of the relevant leadership at the local level and, often, further up the chain of command. It can stimulate an increase in intensity of operations, driven by confidence and an apparent technical or tactical advantage. It may also lead to an increase in desire to join the “winning team.” Conversely, failure can undermine confidence in the leader and even in the cause. At each level of a movement, terrorist leaders will therefore judge the performance of their volunteers and they themselves will be judged by the next higher level of command. In the PIRA this process continues up to the Provisional Army Council level, which is the ultimate arbiter of success or failure.

The membership also judges the success of its leadership, but a combination of factors limits the impact of this process. Such factors include the unifying nature of the cause, the tradition of loyalty and obedience to the movement, the fear of punishment for dissenters, and the fact that the leadership has ensured placement of its own supporters in key posts and learned how to manage and “pack” key meetings. All these factors combine to ensure the unity (to a point) of the movement and the position of the leadership, even when the majority at the grass roots level have been

unhappy. Only the displeasure of a more senior leader is likely to lead to the removal of an unsuccessful commander.

### **Summary of Critical Factors—Terrorist Leadership**

- There are three distinct generations of terrorist leadership, defined as early leaders, follow-on and continuity leaders, and third generation leaders.
- The emergence of each generation is sequential, but all may hold leadership positions at the same time.
- Early leaders are often older (in their thirties and forties) and are capable of promoting the cause, inspiring recruits and followers, and planning operations. Many come from families and communities with a tradition of violent protest.
- Follow-on Leaders are usually younger (in their early twenties) when they emerge, are utterly dedicated to the cause, may be even more ruthless than their predecessors, have clarity of purpose but also mental flexibility, and the ability to think laterally. They have greater strategic vision, reorganizing and redirecting the group, usually to great effect.
- In a long war, attrition will take its toll particularly on commanders at all levels, and new leaders are likely to emerge through the sponsorship of the remaining follow-on leader. These “continuity leaders” are considered to be second generation rather than third because they preserve the status quo and do not radically change the strategic direction of the group.
- Third generation leaders, if they do emerge, are likely to have different backgrounds from the early and follow-on leaders and may have no family tradition in the movement. It is probable that they will seek to fundamentally change the structure and direction of the group, embracing a new political dimension and/or an escalation of violence.
- While a single reason, most likely ideology or defense of one’s community, may motivate some leaders, more usually it is a combination of several factors. Additional factors can include simple hatred, a desire for revenge, the attraction of power and status, the challenge, and family tradition.
- Most terrorist leaders develop a cult of personality to a greater or lesser extent. This has strengths—blind obedience, devotion and loyalty, and willingness to risk or give lives—and weaknesses—emergence of unsuitable leaders, jealousies, belief in the infallibility of the leader, cliques, and cronyism.
- A leadership style common to most is based on patronage and punishment, fear and reward.

- The better terrorist leaders can switch between leadership styles as the circumstances dictate—sometimes they will listen, more often they are dictatorial. When necessary they will retain centralized command and control but they are also willing to devolve significant command responsibility to subordinates.
- The need for secrecy can isolate a terrorist leader, leaving him to rely solely on the advice of a small group of trusted advisors. Concerns over security can also accentuate the feelings of paranoia that most terrorist leaders already have.
- For a variety of reasons it is almost impossible for the rank and file to express displeasure with the leadership. Responses to success and failure are therefore only likely to come from more senior leadership.

## **Lessons Learned**

### **Understand the Adversary**

General Sir Basil Liddell-Hart once said that the target of any campaign should be the “mind of the enemy commander not the bodies of his men.” To apply that maxim, one must intimately understand the enemy commander in order to nullify his strengths and exploit his weaknesses. We must therefore know and understand the nature of terrorist leadership, the motivations of these commanders, and their leadership styles. Unfortunately, our understanding of terrorist leaders is frequently colored by our own prejudices. We feel revulsion for their actions, contempt for their abilities and qualities, and a total disregard for their motivations. These leaders are all too often thought of as “murdering cowards” and “criminals” rather than as dangerous and worthy adversaries who have presented conventionally organized militaries and law enforcement agencies with numerous challenges. After their secret meeting with the IRA in 1972, several senior British officials mistakenly confused the PIRA representatives’ lack of refinement, limited education and somewhat inarticulate speech with inferiority. This was a mistake and the lesson was not lost on the two young emerging leaders also present at those discussions, Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness. Over the years, they would earn the grudging respect of many senior British army officers, but not before the unnecessary expenditure of too much “blood and treasure.”

### **Decapitate the Organization**

Terrorist leadership is based largely on a Cult of Personality, consequently, removing or degrading key leaders can have a disproportionate impact on the combat effectiveness of the group, at least in the short to medium terms. Put simply, cult

leaders do not normally encourage the development of able subordinates capable of replacing them at short notice. Damage the leader and you can seriously damage his cell or network.

### **Analyze Human Factors**

The requirement to understand the mindset of terrorists in general and their leaders in particular places a premium on the development of effective Human Factors analysis capabilities. The right intelligence must be collected and experts with the right skill sets must be available to analyze the material collected. This expertise must include not only intelligence analysts but psychologists, cultural anthropologists, and social scientists as well.

### **Exploit Terrorist Leaders' Vulnerabilities**

Understanding and exploiting specific personality traits manifest in most terrorist leaders can be a very effective strategy. Narcissism and vanity make some leaders susceptible to flattery and blind to their own shortcomings. Their excessive suspiciousness and paranoia, recklessness, or extreme caution are all failings that can be manipulated to good effect. Jealousy of the cult leader is a powerful emotion, which can be provoked in order to foment discord in the group or to recruit informants. Dissatisfaction with a leader can also be used to recruit informants or encourage internal rivalries. Ambition and the desire for power and status in emerging leaders can be fed and encouraged in order to promote internal power struggles and rivalries. Engineering a sequence of terrorist failures in order to discredit a cult leader is an effective approach, especially when one cannot access the individual himself. Once a terrorist leader loses the confidence and respect of his subordinates his fall from the "pedestal" can be rapid and permanent! Intelligently exploiting counterterrorism successes in order to suggest a group has been deeply penetrated will encourage fear and distrust and further exaggerate security concerns, perhaps leading to further isolation of the leader. Discrediting a leader by advertising his contravention of cultural or accepted norms or his failures can also bring dividends. However, all of these approaches are only possible once the mindset of terrorist leadership is fully understood.

## **COMMAND, CONTROL AND COMMUNICATIONS**

### **The Terrorist C2 Process**

Given the nature of terrorist leadership, decision-making authority is confined to small groups at every level of command of the organization. Even in cellular networks, decisions regarding the strategic direction of the group, leadership selection, allocation of resources, and overall command of the "military" and political

campaigns is retained at the center. In the context of the IRA, the Provisional Army Council (PAC), an elected body comprising seven voting members (with others co-opted for specific reasons), held the ultimate authority within the movement. The PAC is the single most powerful decision-making body in the movement and it provides strategic direction to the entire organization, including both the PIRA and Sinn Féin. On occasion, especially when “spectacular” attacks are planned, they may retain command authority. However, in order to maintain the security of the network and provide safe distance between the leadership and operations (physically and legally), control of the day-to-day activities of cells and subnetworks was usually delegated to the appropriate level.

Below the PAC was the GHQ of the PIRA, which ran all overseas operations and commanded all of the functional departments, e.g., QM, Engineering, Internal Security. Below the GHQ, were Northern Command, which ran all operations in Northern Ireland; and Southern Command, which fulfilled a Rear Area function (training, logistics, engineering, etc.) Below Northern Command were regionally organized subnetwork headquarters, still referred to as “brigades” and “battalions” by the PIRA. These HQs planned and commanded day-to-day operations. Contact between cells and higher headquarters was kept to a minimum and was usually only through cell leaders.

Out of necessity, following the reverses of the early 1970s, the PIRA became one of the first organizations to embrace the concept of “mission command.” Higher headquarters would allocate resources, provide intelligence, allocate areas of operations, determine rules of engagement and offer direction on target selection but a surprising degree of freedom was still delegated to middle-ranking and junior commanders. Key to the success of this approach was the ability of the PAC, GHQ, and Northern Command to successfully communicate their intent thereby setting effective limits on junior commanders’ freedom to maneuver. Commanders who went beyond the limits of their authority were often dealt with severely. However, at the intermediate and lower levels, leaders often employed more autocratic means of command and control within their own subnetwork or cell. Some would continue to employ this approach even as they progressed through the organization, leading to the erosion of the cellular structure and increased vulnerability.

Decentralized C2 was critical to the success of the IRA during the combat phase but was potentially detrimental once its strategy progressed to the dual-track approach with both political and military dimensions in play. As the peace process developed in the 1990s, leading eventually to a formal cease-fire and the Good Friday Accord, there was an increased need to control the activities and thinking of all levels.

Not every member of the PIRA was in agreement with this approach and the tactical actions of individual terrorists could have strategic impact, hence the major restructuring of the intermediary levels of leadership chain to ensure that the PAC was able to maintain tight control over the volunteers.

In contrast to this decentralized approach, the ETA for many years controlled its forces from the center. Even low-level tactical operations were often directed by senior commanders or at the very least were personally sanctioned by them. However, as the Spanish government's counterterrorist strategy finally began to achieve notable successes in the 1990s, the weakness of centralized control became apparent to the ETA. But by that time, a significant degree of damage had been done and many leaders had been arrested and convicted. The ETA response has been to evolve beyond the cellular structure of the PIRA and create autonomous cells whose leaders have very little contact with higher authority. These cell leaders have been given delegated authority to raise, train and equip their own cells and to plan and execute operations themselves without the necessity to seek higher authority. The quality of these very young leaders was not high at first as many lacked experience. One can expect, however, that, through a process of "natural selection," the best will learn, adapt, and overcome.

### **Command Structure—Formal or Informal?**

Even after the PIRA had adopted a cellular structure, there remained a desire to maintain the appearance of a militaristic command structure. This apparently formalized chain of command was retained for a variety of very good reasons. For one thing, everyone in the group and the wider community had gotten used to the quasi-military terminology first adopted. In addition, being defined as an "Army" lends the appearance of moral legitimacy to the group—freedom fighters, not terrorists. It also provides a degree of formality for what remains essentially an irregular/informal movement, thereby facilitating more effective command and control. This factor is particularly important in larger, and more active groups where the need to control greater numbers of specific operations of greater intensity or complexity necessitates a more militaristic approach.

Appearances can however be deceptive. While formalized terminology may be used, most terrorist groups usually have a very informal approach to the actual business of command and control. In actuality, the approach used varies at least slightly between almost every cell and subnetwork, because it is a process driven largely by the personal characteristics of the leader, by the quality of his subordinates, and by the trust between the two. The only exceptions to this rule are the functional divisions of a group, such as the Quarter Master, Engineering departments, and

security department. In these areas, command and control is often more formal and sharply delineated. These functional areas usually have clearly defined responsibilities and a hierarchical chain of command leading directly to the PAC. Consequently, the functional areas in general and the QM function in particular can be the Achilles' heel of the organization if the security forces manage to penetrate it.

### **The Role of Social Networks**

As discussed earlier (the role of family and friends, the place of patronage, the closed community of the terrorist, etc.), terrorist command and control structures often reflect or reinforce preexisting social structures. They can also create new social networks because of the increasing dependence of the individual on the group for reinforcement, validation, and security and because of the cult status of certain leaders. Indeed, as time progresses this new social network can supplant more traditional networks such as family and community.

### **Leadership Communications**

Both the IRA and ETA have employed a considerable array of communications techniques in order to stay ahead of the British and Spanish security forces. However, intercepting terrorist communications still remains one of the most lucrative sources of information on their activities. For the IRA, the basic method of communicating was the so-called "comm.," a small, very tightly wrapped note, which was extremely easily concealed and specially folded so that any unauthorized opening of it would be evident to the recipient. In the early days, both IRA and ETA operatives relied upon the fixed telephone network and two-way CB radios, particularly for distance communications and for use on operations. Eventually, however, they learned how vulnerable these means are to interception. Efforts to develop codes were worthwhile in the short term but were usually broken quite quickly as communications security remained poor, codes were relatively simple, and informants proliferated.

As the telecommunications revolution progressed, the terrorists sought to exploit it. Frequency-hopping radios were acquired and encryption systems deployed. The cell phone revolution has provided a new avenue to exploit, and pay-as-you-go phones have become particularly popular. These phones are used for very short periods and even as one-time-use systems in order to avoid detection. Pagers have also been used on occasion. Recognizing the potential for interception, terrorists are using telecommunications more carefully (if at all), with veiled speech on the phone, particularly for mobiles. There has also been a major change in the way that certain groups employ CB radios. They have transitioned through veiled speech, to coded

speech, to clicks, to use of this medium only in response to a problem. The ETA in particular has also been increasing its use of the Internet as a means to communicate with its operatives. This has included the use of codes and public key encryption. The Provisionals are also known to have exploited the web, but they have serious concerns relating to its security.

In short, all types of telecommunications are vulnerable and a variety of traditional communications methods have remained in use. Face-to-face meetings between trusted parties are still favored, and the PIRA will go to great lengths to avoid conversations being recorded. Over time, the nature of these meetings has changed from “conferences,” or full military-style “Orders Groups,” to very limited discussions or briefings of key individuals on a rigid need to know basis. Meeting locations were carefully chosen and depending on the period and on local practice, meeting locations would be secured by volunteers, a complex operation in its own right. As their understanding of the threat of electronic surveillance increased, the PIRA began to exploit high-quality off-the-shelf technology in order to sweep venues. One senior commander took his concern about being bugged so seriously that he eschewed conversation in his own home, relying mostly on grunts to communicate with his family. Traditional espionage techniques such as dead letter boxes are also utilized, as well as trusted runners for the delivery of both written and verbal messages.

### **Summary of Critical Factors—Command, Control and Communications**

- Terrorist groups that retain centralized control over operations are far more vulnerable than those that delegate substantial authority to subordinate commanders.
- Within groups that have adopted a cellular organization, senior leaders offer strategic direction, control resources, and maintain overall command of the campaign but usually devolve significant operational responsibility to intermediate and junior commanders—a form of terrorist “mission command.” The exception being certain high-profile attacks with strategic impact often referred to by the PIRA as “spectaculars”.
- At certain times (e.g., during the peace process) centralized command may be reimposed in order to maintain tight control of the network/group.
- While aspects of a military-style chain of command and associated terminology are retained even in a cellular organization, terrorist C2 remains a largely informal, personality-driven process.



- Terrorist groups are increasingly relying on alternatives to telecommunications in order to avoid detection. Traditional espionage techniques have made a comeback, but for operations the careful use of cell phones and CB radios is still necessary. Decreased reliance on telecommunications can impose a considerable constraint on effective C2 but does significantly improve communications security.

### **Lessons Learned**

Any organization with a command and control system that is personality driven is highly vulnerable to disruption and degradation. Efforts to separate commanders from subordinates and to undermine confidence up and down the command process can reap dividends in a system with little or no formal structure. Denial or disruption of critical communications means will also inhibit operational effectiveness.

### **HOW DO TERRORIST MOVEMENTS LEARN?**

In order for a terrorist group to evolve and survive, it must be able to absorb operational lessons; to recognize and adapt to external threats and a changing political climate, to develop new concepts, structures and tactics; and to embrace new technology. This study suggests that most groups learn in broadly similar ways. Indeed, the author argues that only about 10% of everything each terrorist group does—how it is organized, trained, equipped, and operated—is completely new and has never been done before. Of the remaining 90%, approximately 30% is simply the adaptation of an existing approach, tactic, or technique and the remaining 60% is not new at all and has already been tried or exploited by most other terrorist groups. This largely common learning process is explained below.

### **Past Knowledge and Experience**

At the outset, the IRA and to a lesser extent the ETA have benefited greatly from being able to draw upon the “combat” experience of a cadre of seasoned fighters who were blooded in earlier conflicts. These groups have also been able to exploit the skills and experience acquired by members who had previously served in the armed forces. As a result, they were able to commence operations with an adequate appreciation of basic tactics and some useful weapons skills. Individuals with past experience were also able to more quickly absorb and put into practice the skills derived from stolen or purchased military manuals.

## **Mentors and Third Parties**

Most terrorist groups appear to have adopted the philosophy that “the enemy of my enemy is my friend.” As a result, there is a significant degree of cooperation between terrorist groups irrespective of their ideology. The IRA has at various times received advice and training from Palestinian terrorist groups, Libya, and the ETA. In return, it has provided advice and assistance to the ETA, Corsican terrorists, and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). Throughout the 1980s, ETA provided training and advice to various South American left-wing groups. In Europe, the Red Army Faction provided help and guidance to the CCC in Belgium and Action Direct in France. Most recently, we have observed the al Qaeda network providing training and resources to a wide range of Muslim terrorist and insurgent movements. Mentoring can significantly speed up the evolution of a terrorist group into a major threat.

## **Reflection and Contemplation**

We must avoid at all costs underestimating the capacity of terrorist leaders to undertake extended periods of reflection and contemplation. The most successful have always continually reviewed their own performance and conducted in-depth analysis of the conflict in order to develop new strategies, exploit emerging opportunities, or counter our successes. The results of this reflection are sometimes exposed through publications apparently authored by subordinates in order to gauge the reactions of the membership. While under extreme pressure, terrorist leaders have limited opportunities for such contemplation, however, successful counterterrorism efforts can provide the terrorist with time to reflect. Several terrorist leaders have used “Jail time” effectively as a time for deliberation and review. Indeed, the reorganization of the IRA into a cellular structure and its successful “long war” strategy based on a dual-track approach was devised by Gerry Adams while in jail and have since become known as the “Cage 11” reforms, after the cell block in which he was incarcerated.

## **Education and Training**

The education and training of a “volunteer” is a critical method by which terrorists learn, and the sophistication of this process is a good indicator of how dangerous a group has become. Gerry Adams was at pains to ensure an intellectual foundation to PIRA, and the IRA Green Book he helped introduce was in part developed to codify the training and education requirements for each volunteer. Additional training manuals for different types of operations and a range of weapons were also written. On the job and low-level training was provided for new recruits,

but as they progressed in the movement their training improved substantially. Eventually they would be sent to specialist training events in Southern Ireland and even the Middle East. Specialists, particularly from the Engineering department, were also sent to legitimate training institutions to acquire specific technical skills.

### **Trial and Error**

Many terrorist groups learn their tradecraft simply through trial and error, which can be an extremely effective, albeit dangerous learning process. Usually out of necessity, but occasionally by design, a new weapon or tactic will be deployed more in hope than expectation that things will proceed as planned. When they do not, lessons are learned and modifications are made. This process can go through several iterations until a technique or tool has been perfected. This process often results in the death of a volunteer, but this does not appear to unduly impact on morale.

### **Research, Development, and Operational Evaluation**

The pinnacle of the terrorist learning process is probably the creation of an effective research and development capability. Perhaps the best example of this is the Engineering and R & D departments of the PIRA, which have demonstrated the ability to undertake detailed research leading to the development and manufacture of high-grade explosives, cost-effective weapons, sophisticated initiation devices, and counter-counter measures. These weapons have then been tested in the field through a formalized operational evaluation process. The creation of such a capability can significantly improve operational effectiveness, reduce overheads, and make detection of the logistics tail far more difficult. In most cases it does, however, require a relatively permissive operating environment, as existed in much of Southern Ireland for many years.

### **Intelligence**

A further indication of the advancement of a terrorist group is the sophistication of its intelligence organization. In order for a group to conduct operations effectively and survive it must be able to collect information on targets and threats. This formalized learning process is one of the key capabilities of a group like the PIRA. It includes effective direction from senior commanders, the production of coordinated collection plans, the acquisition and utilization of HUMINT, SIGINT, and even IMINT and ELINT collection assets; the analysis of collected material by dedicated intelligence officers, and the rapid dissemination of intelligence on a strict need-to-know-basis. In procedural terms, the IRA's intelligence cycle is highly effective. The main limitations are the technical sophistication of some of its collection assets and the lack of analytical tools and comprehensive databases, not

because of any inability to acquire such tools but because of the need to avoid the collection of incriminating material. Despite these limitations, the PIRA has used this capability effectively to identify government security force weaknesses. The ETA has also devoted a considerable effort to develop an effective intelligence collection and analysis capability.

### **After Action Analysis and Red Teams**

Since the early 1970s the PIRA has dedicated a significant amount of effort to a relatively formalized lessons learned process. After every operation the senior commander involved, and perhaps his commander as well will conduct a thorough review of every aspect of the operation, assessing what worked, what went wrong, and why. Particular emphasis is placed on reviewing security force tactics and capabilities. The analysis from this process may also be revisited in the future as new evidence becomes available. The results of the review are then disseminated to all other cells. The PIRA have also been known to establish red teams to wargame security force tactics in an effort to detect weakness and devise approaches to avoid or nullify strengths. While not at the same level of sophistication, the ETA also has a lessons learned process. The ETA's move to more autonomous cells may have reduced the effectiveness of the process. The impact of this process has been demonstrated time and again by the ability of both the PIRA and the ETA to correct tactical and technical shortcomings before they become critical and to exploit identified security force weaknesses.

### **Summary of Critical Factors—How Terrorists Learn**

- Terrorists learn and adapt through a number of formal and informal processes including
  - Past Experience
  - Third Parties and Mentors
  - Reflection and Contemplation
  - Education and Training
  - Trial and Error
  - Research and Development
  - Intelligence
  - Lessons Learned and Red Teams

## **Lessons Learned**

### **Learn from Terrorists' Mistakes**

A common comment from security force personnel when assessing a terrorist attack or weapon is “why on earth did he do that.” It must be remembered that terrorists do not have the luxury of sophisticated research and development facilities and doctrine development centers. More often than not terrorists have to test a new tactic or weapon in the field to determine if it will work. This approach may often fail, sometimes resulting in the injury, capture, or death of a volunteer. Attributing this to terrorist stupidity (the paddy factor) is a very dangerous miscalculation of the terrorist approach to learning. Chances are that at some point in the future the terrorist will have refined a tactic or modified a weapon to deadly effect. It is therefore vital that security forces learn as much from terrorists' mistakes and failure as the terrorists themselves and that countermeasures be developed for the time when they get it right.

### **Confuse the Enemy**

The smart terrorist will seek to develop a variety of methods for learning the lessons of success and failure and for developing approaches that will avoid security force strengths and exploit perceived weaknesses. It is therefore essential that considerable effort be devoted to identifying and understanding these methods. Once known, it is possible to manipulate these approaches in order to disrupt operations or at least slow down the learning process.

## **RECRUITMENT**

### **Early Recruits**

As indicated in the section on Individual Motivations, the typical recruit to the newly formed Provisional IRA in 1970 did not have a coherent ideology that drove him and sometimes her to become a terrorist. Instead most were driven by events and the immediate causes of the disorder and violence, which they had experienced first hand or observed via the media. By and large, their early motivations were to “right” the many “wrongs” experienced by the Catholic Nationalist community through civil rights protest. Impatience at the authorities' slow response to their demands and anger at continued exclusion from the political process led to frustration and civil disobedience. The authorities' subsequent overreaction and the violence of the Protestant mobs rapidly increased tensions, eventually leading to widespread violence. As a result, their desire for change turned into self-defense, which then mutated into hatred and a thirst for revenge. From there it was a short walk to the

PIRA, with its seductive ideology of armed struggle, defeat of the “Crown” and a united Ireland.

The populist nature of the early days also made joining the PIRA the “thing to do,” if you “cared,” and to attain “status,” particularly for the younger men. Not unlike the early days of World War One, there was also a certain amount of peer, family, and community pressure to volunteer and “do ones bit”. Most seemed to have little or no conception of where their acts would lead, trusting instead in blind faith, which was all too easily cultivated and manipulated by astute terrorist leaders. The quality of most of these early recruits was poor, and many became the cannon fodder of the early years of conflict.

### **Later Recruits**

The motivations of the early recruits—socioeconomic change, political inclusion and self-defense—waned over time as the UK authorities addressed many of the causes of the “conflict”. Soon recruits had to make a much more positive decision to join the PIRA, as it was no longer about the need to protect one’s community and improve one’s lot. The possibility of arrest, imprisonment, and death resulting from the decision to join the PIRA also became more evident, deterring some possible recruits. The next generation of volunteers therefore needed to be more determined and more committed to the Republican cause. However, while arguably more committed, the majority of these new recruits continued to be of limited ability and potential. Slowly, however, as the standard of education improved after the hiatus of the early 1970s, so too did the standard of recruits.

To improve the quality of recruits and to find volunteers not known to the authorities, the PIRA refined its procedures for identifying, screening, and approving new recruits. A formal process of induction and indoctrination, known as “green booking,” was also introduced. The Green Book detailed the duties and responsibilities of volunteers and laid out the formal rules, regulations, and procedures of the PIRA. Once “green booked” volunteers were duty and honor bound to adhere to these rules and regulations. Punishments, including death, for failing to do so were also listed in the Green Book. This process was intended to ensure that recruits had the right type of character and ability and a certain level of commitment and integrity. The PIRA also began to actively seek out individuals for specific purposes: “clean skins” (unknown to the authorities) for out of area operations and recruits with specific technical skills to work in the Engineering department. This culminated in the mid-1990s with a formal strategy that placed greater emphasis on quality, not quantity.

Even as late as the 1980s, overreaction by local security force units still provoked a marked increase in recruitment in the areas affected. This suggests that addressing the underlying causes of terrorism will reduce support, but excesses by the authorities can still reinvigorate a terrorist group. That said the pool from which these recruits came was significantly reduced over time, as the political process became more inclusive, discrimination ended, and the standard of living of most Catholics improved. However, by emphasizing quality over quantity and adopting a cellular structure, the PIRA made substantial progress toward offsetting the negative impact of a declining reservoir of potential recruits. Fewer potential recruits were available but fewer were actually required. If the cease-fire were to break down, the improved quality of recruits would make the movement more capable in the short term but probably more vulnerable in the longer term as attrition began to take its toll.

### **Who Were the Recruiters?**

In the early stages of the campaign (1969–72), recruitment appeared to be a shared responsibility among most active members of the PIRA. In fact, many potential members came in search of the IRA rather than necessarily being sought out by the group. These walk-ins had been radicalized by events and had become aware of the PIRA recruitment drive through their friends and family, the wider community, or their church. At that time, it was not hard to find someone who knew a member of the IRA. In this respect, the route to the PIRA was not that different from the route taken by those drawn to al Qaeda. However, as the flow of walk-in recruits declined and the PIRA raised its standards, talent spotters were employed on a more regular basis. Most active members also continued to play a key role in seeking out suitable new members, as of course did cell leaders. Interestingly, as overall numbers declined, the percentage of new recruits drawn from families and small communities with a Republican tradition increased again.

### **Employment—Full Time and Auxiliary**

As in any regular military force, the terrorist entity has a number of tasks to be accomplished, and not all of these functions require front line troops. The PIRA of the 1980s and 1990s therefore continued to recruit and employ larger numbers of lower quality or inexperienced auxiliary volunteers. They were used to collect information, (so-called “dickers”), as runners or messengers, as drivers, and on occasion as a community protection force. There were also leadership or command requirements at “battalion” and “brigade” level, that called for dedicated “leg men.” These tasks were often the most visible to the authorities and those performing them were the most prone to capture. These volunteers had little knowledge of the group and were of low quality, they therefore were expendable. These auxiliary duties were

also an ideal test of the resolve, integrity, and quality of new recruits and an excellent way to “blood” them without compromising “active” units. Despite the obvious dangers, the thrill of association and the possibility of being inducted into the group ensured that morale among these auxiliaries was not unduly eroded.

The use of auxiliary personnel ensured that the much smaller number of more able, trusted, and proven recruits now available were not wasted on less important tasks. Instead they were posted to Active Service Units, Spec-ops teams, and the functional departments. Here, they would be given specialist training to develop desired skill sets based largely on aptitude. The most able recruits would often be posted to the all-important R & D, Engineering, and Quarter Master departments.

### **Summary of Critical Factors—Recruitment**

- The underlying causes that motivate terrorists—socioeconomic conditions, political exclusion, and authority excesses—were the primary drivers for recruitment.
- Many early recruits to the PIRA were walk-ins who made their own way to the group because of personal motivations and, to a lesser extent, peer, family, and community pressure. The quality of many of these early recruits was poor.
- The PIRA expertly manipulated the fear, anger, and frustration of many Nationalists and successfully goaded the authorities into continued overreaction in order to further radicalize the community and thereby attract even more recruits.
- At this stage, all Republicans and not just PIRA volunteers were encouraged to seek out potential recruits and point them in the direction of the “RA.”
- Over time, the removal of many of the underlying causes that motivated most early recruits did significantly reduce the reservoir of potential volunteers.
- Later recruits were primarily drawn to the PIRA by its ideology rather than by external factors, although the occasional excesses of the security forces could still inspire rage and indignation and did cause recruitment to spike.
- A larger percentage of the later recruits were more able, dedicated, and committed to the cause, and a larger overall percentage of what was a much smaller intake were yet again drawn from families with a Republican tradition.
- In time, the PIRA introduced a more formal system for selecting, screening, and inducting new recruits and their emphasis changed from quantity to quality.



- In later years, much more use was made of talent spotters and a serious effort was made to recruit volunteers with specific aptitudes or who were unknown to the authorities (so-called clean skins).
- Even in later years, a considerable number of less able recruits were employed in support roles in order to avoid dissipating the much smaller pool of high quality recruits, who were instead posted to the ASU's and specialist units.

## **Lessons Learned**

### **Act Early**

Many of those who joined the PIRA in the early years did so in order to defend their communities and to achieve socioeconomic and political change, not because of ideology or a desire to kill. The lesson again is that early and obvious efforts to deal with underlying causes, whatever they might be, and the implementation of a coordinated information campaign designed to win the war of ideas will pay dividends. Security force action can only deal with the symptoms of conflict, and not the causes.

### **Avoid Provocation**

Experience has shown that terrorists and insurgents will do everything in their power to provoke an overreaction from the authorities in order to radicalize a community and attract more recruits. Although it places a huge strain on the security forces and significant risks have to be taken, avoiding such provocation will, in time, undermine the legitimacy of the group and stem the flow of recruits. This was vividly demonstrated in the 1980s by which time security force excesses had largely been stamped out. On the rare occasions when a British army unit did overreact or conduct a disproportionate action, soon afterwards a significant albeit temporary spike in recruitment would be detected in the affected community.

### **Catch the Small Fry**

The PIRA uses larger numbers of low grade operatives to carry out many of the necessary support tasks, including intelligence collection, leaving the best free to conduct offensive operations. If this pool of the possibly less committed and the certainly less able can be reduced, the operational effectiveness of the group will be significantly affected. More able volunteers would then have to be deployed to conduct the more observable support tasks. Devoting effort to detect and remove the "small fry" (by arrest or persuasion) is therefore worthwhile, rather than simply focusing on the leadership and the more deadly operatives.

## **Counter the Ideology**

Even after underlying causes have been diminished, a much smaller but significant minority are still attracted to the group. These later recruits are drawn instead by the seductive ideology of the group and its offer of a utopian future. In order to forestall this appeal, a long-term information strategy needs to be in place ideally from the outset of any intervention. The aims of this strategy should be to counter all arguments deployed by the group to encourage support and recruitment; to highlight positive change; and to promote nonviolent expressions of protest and disagreement, even if such channels are not supportive of the authority position. Direct action also has to be taken to counter or remove those individuals or groups who directly or indirectly encourage the ideology, foster hatred, or act as talent spotters and recruiters.

## **Turn Terrorist Focus on “Quality” Recruits into a Weakness**

An emphasis on quality over quantity will increase the direct threat posed by individual terrorists. However, a declining reservoir, achieved by a holistic approach to combating terrorism, significantly increases the vulnerability of the group to an attritional campaign, assuming of course that excesses are avoided.

## **TERRORIST WEAPONS CAPABILITIES**

When the PIRA began to mount a sustained campaign in 1970, it inherited a substantial arsenal of old weapons last used in the border war, which ended in 1962. This included a combination of antiquated military firearms (including some automatic weapons) and a wide range of civilian rifles and pistols. It also had a small stockpile of mostly commercial explosives with which it could make crude explosive devices. With mostly unskilled and inexperienced fighters, the PIRA was limited to relatively unsophisticated attacks. The existing stockpile of weapons was therefore adequate for its purposes. But, while this existing armory obviated the need to acquire substantial quantities of additional weapons from external sources at the outset of the campaign, the stockpile was eventually depleted by combat expenditure and losses, weapons failures and seizures. The IRA also quickly became aware of the limitations of its existing arsenal, especially after the British army deployed to Northern Ireland with a sophisticated array of weapons and capabilities.

From 1970 on, the IRA began an extensive effort to acquire new and more sophisticated weapons and explosives. The acquisition included military standard small arms, support weapons up to and including heavy machine guns, and antitank rocket launchers. The IRA made substantial arms purchases on the black market, but in the early days the most productive source, by far, was supporters in the United

States, who acquired substantial quantities of weapons purchased and stolen. In the case of explosives, a substantial amount was stolen from civilian facilities in Ireland and mainland Britain until protective security measures, including better accounting procedures, were introduced.

### **Improvised Weapons**

The cost of acquiring weapons placed great strain on the limited coffers of the PIRA and necessitated significant effort to secure additional funding from a variety of sources including donations and numerous criminal activities (extortion, fraud, theft, etc.). The PIRA therefore decided to create the capability to design, develop, and manufacture its own weapons and explosives in order to reduce reliance on expensive and vulnerable external sources and to provide specialized weapons for unique targets. It established what was eventually to become one of the most sophisticated terrorist engineering departments ever seen. For a long time, the authorities missed the significance of this effort. The ability to mass-produce improvised explosives and weapons enables a terrorist group to sustain a campaign without the costs and risks associated with the acquisition of black market military and commercial arms and explosives.

The quality of the PIRA-developed weapons was sometimes very high for the tasks at hand. For example, the development of a disposable antitank weapons, which was more than a match for the armored vehicles deployed by the British army, eliminated the need for the IRA to acquire and secure the costly RPG-7. In all likelihood, the most infamous product of the PIRA factories has been the series of mortars deployed to such devastating effect over the years. These mortars range from the very high-quality Mk-12 and Mk-16 antivehicle weapons to the much more rudimentary Mk-15 heavy mortar. This weapon is simple to make (a welded metal tube with a warhead made from an industrial gas canister) and highly effective (it has been used to attack Heathrow airport, military and police installations, and even the official residence of the UK prime minister). More recently it would appear that the IRA has exported this technology to the FARC in Colombia.

In addition, the PIRA developed the capability to manufacture massive quantities of home-made explosives and by the 1990s could mix explosives with a yield equivalent to about 80% of a similar quantity of military-grade explosives. These explosives, which were often mixed to order, were not made in specialized factories but in barns and other isolated buildings. By the early 1990s, the IRA was able to deploy bombs containing as much as 3,000 pounds of explosives, about the equivalent of 2,500 pounds of military-grade explosives. These bombs devastated the centers of London and Manchester, causing over \$7 billion of damage. In conjunction

with advances in explosives, the PIRA has also devoted considerable energy to developing increasingly sophisticated initiation devices often capable of nullifying existing security force countermeasures. To combat this threat, the full resources of the government had to be deployed in order to stay one step ahead of the terrorist.

### **International Support**

During the 1980s as the PIRA became much more ambitious, the UK security forces also became much more effective at locating terrorist arms caches. The PIRA therefore needed to acquire much larger quantities of weapons and explosives like Semtex, both to expand its operations and to replace losses. Around this time it enjoyed the largesse of a benefactor who himself had good reason to hate the UK government—the leader of Libya, Colonel Muammar Qaddafi. Over a period of several years he authorized the shipment of hundreds of tons of Libyan weapons to the PIRA. The UK and French authorities, following a successful undercover operation, intercepted the last shipment, which weighed over 150 tons. These weapons were destined to be used in a large-scale operation (a la the Tet Offensive) that the PIRA planned to launch in 1985. This external international support provided the IRA with a significant boost and international cooperation was required to stop it.

### **Specialized Weapons**

For most of the last 30 years the PIRA has shown only a limited interest in specialized weapons. Although it has acquired such weapons (LPO 50 Flame Throwers, 14.5mm and 12.7mm heavy machine guns, SA-7 SAMs, etc.) the PIRA has primarily relied on relatively small quantities of automatic rifles, pistols, light support weapons, and explosives to prosecute its campaign effectively. As it matured the PIRA found that it actually needs far fewer weapons than it actually acquired and that the effort to purchase, transport, and store larger quantities of weapons can be counterproductive, draining limited finances and exposing vital personnel (especially the QM chain) to detection and capture. Indeed, the ability to secure or manufacture weapons away from the prying eyes of the authorities is a critical factor in the success of any terrorist group. The significantly improved relationship between the UK and Irish governments has made it much more difficult for the PIRA to store, make or move weapons in the South. In Ulster, the British army and the former RUC (the Police Service of Northern Ireland) developed extensive capabilities to locate and observe weapons caches and for the deactivation and tagging of weapons found. At various times these capabilities have seriously impacted on PIRA operational capabilities.

## **Effective Usage**

The PIRA realized at an early stage that effective training and improvements in strategy and tactics were as important as improvements in weaponry. They realized that they would need to acquire or manufacture, store, and maintain far fewer weapons if the ones they had were used effectively. An extensive training program was therefore instigated, but only for those that would actually use the weapons. Considerable efforts were also devoted to developing and perfecting new tactics, some of which were borrowed from other groups. Low-level operatives were not given particularly sophisticated training but specialist operators were, usually at secret training facilities in the South and even with other groups in the Middle East.

## **The ETA**

There are very few real differences between the IRA and ETA with respect to the capabilities sought and exploited. Like the IRA, the ETA has acquired, largely from the black market, substantial quantities of small arms, some light support weapons, and military and commercial explosives. It too has developed an Engineering department although not quite to the same level of sophistication as the PIRA. Since the loss of its French safe haven, training has been much more difficult, lowering the proficiency of members. The ability to hide weapons caches in France has also been diminished, leading to greater attrition of weapons stocks.

## **Summary of Critical Factors—Terrorist Capabilities**

- At the outset of the present “troubles” the IRA already possessed a significant quantity of mostly antiquated but still effective small arms and commercial-grade explosives. By comparison, the ETA had to expend considerable effort and resources to expand its arsenal as it escalated its campaign.
- As operational expenditure, combat losses, and seizures quickly began to erode stockpile of weapons, increased efforts were made to secure weapons from the black market and international supporters.
- Improvements in security force capabilities will prompt the terrorist to seek more sophisticated weaponry up to a point—automatic rifles, grenade launchers, sniper rifles, night vision goggles, antitank weapons, etc.
- The PIRA and ETA have rarely sought exotic weapons except to exploit specific vulnerabilities or to attack otherwise invulnerable high-value targets (e.g., heavy machine guns and SAMs to attack Army aviation). By and large,

small arms, light support weapons, and explosives have been the weapons of choice.

- The acquisition, transportation, and storage of weapons acquired abroad can be a costly and risky undertaking. Huge effort has to be expended to raise money and significant risks taken to locate suitably secure sources and to transport purchases back to the home base. Theft of weapons and explosives is also risky but continues to be exploited especially during ceasefire periods
- International assistance is essential to foil terrorist attempts to fund, acquire, transport, and store weapons.
- The development of their own arms and explosives manufacturing capability provided both groups with a ready supply of relatively cheap weapons built to meet their unique operational requirements.
- The ingenuity of terrorists should never be underestimated. The PIRA became particularly effective at developing unique technologies, particularly remote initiation devices that were sometimes able to nullify deployed countermeasures.
- The storage, maintenance, issue, and recovery of weapons is a vulnerable process that can be detected, monitored, and interdicted. Resources devoted to the detection and surveillance of arms caches will pay dividends for the authorities.
- The PIRA and ETA have recognized that improvements in tactics and training can significantly increase the lethality of the relatively small number of weapons normally held. In this regard, access to secure safe havens abroad in order to conduct more advanced training is usually necessary.
- In reality, terrorist groups actually require relatively limited quantities of arms ammunition and explosives in order to present a significant threat.
- The most effective method for significantly reducing the flow of sophisticated weaponry is to interdict terrorist financing.

## **Lessons Learned**

### **Secure International Support**

It is absolutely vital that international support is secured and maintained in order to reduce terrorist funding, disrupt arms purchases, interdict supply routes, and deny safe storage sites. The UK government would never have been able to significantly reduce the supply of weapons to the IRA without the eventual active

cooperation of the Irish, American, and French governments in particular. Likewise, the Spanish government's efforts to disrupt the ETA improved immeasurably once the French government began to cooperate in order to deny safe havens and funding sources. To secure and maintain that level of international cooperation, both Governments had to develop counterterrorist strategies that were proportionate, legal, and, broadly speaking, within internationally accepted norms.

### **Surveil and Interdict Weapons Activities**

The Quarter Master department probably leaves the biggest "footprint" of any terrorist activity. Weapons must be acquired, transported, stored, maintained, issued, delivered, used, recovered, cleaned, and stored again, all under the watchful eye of the authorities. Each Quarter Master will conduct these duties in different ways, but there are only so many places to hide a weapon or ways in which to transport it. Developing technical capabilities to locate, monitor, track, deactivate, or electronically tag a weapon will pay dividends in the War Against Terrorism. Not only will such activities prevent terrorist attacks and significantly reduce the operational capability of the group, they may also lead to the terrorist themselves. Such capabilities may include low-level aerial surveillance, covert ground surveillance operations, HUMINT sources, and other technical operations. Security considerations preclude further discussion of this topic, but the importance of these capabilities cannot be underestimated.

### **Monitor Terrorist Innovations**

The terrorist will constantly seek to develop tactics and capabilities to circumvent or nullify antiterrorist countermeasures. It is therefore essential to develop the capability to monitor terrorist tactical and technical innovation in order to predict likely innovations. It is then possible to design and/or develop counter-countermeasures that can then be fielded quickly, as and when the need arises. This requires a unique combination of skills, as many terrorist innovations are devised out of necessity and rely more on ingenuity and engineering skills than on science. In some ways, and with all due respect to the terrorist, this requires the scientific community to "dumb down" in their deliberations.

### **Realistically Assess Terrorist Capabilities**

It is sometimes difficult for militaries to quantify the threat presented by a terrorist group that may number only 300 to 400 members and whose arsenal might be limited to less than a thousand small arms and light support weapons, limited quantities of military-grade explosives (perhaps less than 15 tons), and the ability to manufacture improvised explosives. In reality, a motivated terrorist armed with an

assault rifle, and an improvised antitank mortar, or driving a vehicle loaded with 3,000 pounds of home-made explosives can be a formidable adversary. When firing on automatic, with no regard for collateral damage, even a 12 year old with a poorly maintained AK-47 can be a deadly assassin. Conversely, the capture of only five rifles and a pistol can be a severe setback for a terrorist cell. It is therefore necessary to change one's approach to assessing the capabilities of this type of adversary and the criteria used to judge success or failure against such a foe. Both the public and politicians must also be educated so that they too are able to understand the significance of losses in a terrorist war. Body counts have never been a reliable method of measuring success; they are even less so in the War Against Terrorism.

## **METHODS OF OPERATIONS**

Numerous authors have already written much about the various methods of operation favored by terrorist groups. In the context of this study the important point to stress is that in most respects the PIRA and ETA have employed exactly the same tactics and techniques as almost every other group including al Qaeda. Bombings, using hand-delivered and vehicle-borne explosives, and shootings (including assassinations and ambushes), remain the operations of choice. In recent years, perhaps the only significant differences between the methods favored by the PIRA and the ETA on the one hand, and groups like al Qaeda and Palestinian groups, on the other hand has been the use of suicide bombers, and the numbers of casualties inflicted.

### **Suicide Missions**

For cultural and operational reasons, both the PIRA and ETA have rejected the use of suicide missions. Suicide does, of course, go against the cultural norms of a Western Christian society, and this was a key factor that influenced leaders of both groups. That said the PIRA and ETA have been pragmatic and morally flexible on this issue. Both groups have recognized at the highest level that trained and experienced volunteers are more useful alive than dead, and each group has demonstrated time and again the ability to penetrate the most secure targets without having to sacrifice a valuable volunteer. There were, however, times when this policy was overruled because of the greater needs of the movement. This was most dramatically demonstrated in the deaths of 10 PIRA hunger strikers in 1981, a key period for the Republican movement.

The escape of a volunteer is therefore one of the most critical phases of any operation. Indeed, a veteran IRA man once described the escape phase "as 70% of an attack plan." That is not to suggest, however, that IRA and ETA operatives were not



willing to take great risks, especially when utilizing new tactics or weapons. Many have died on operations and this has not unduly impacted on the morale of their comrades. Where suicidal operations have been mounted, this has probably reflected the personal motivations of the volunteer rather than the strategy of the group.

### **Operational Constraints**

Looking at the entire period of “troubles” in Northern Ireland and the conflict in Spain/Basque region, it appears that certain PIRA and ETA leaders, when they deemed it necessary, abandoned what might be termed “cultural norms of conflict,” adopting whatever tactics were required to achieve the aim. From the 1980s on, the leadership of both groups has sought to appear in step with cultural norms of violence against “legitimate” targets. This was necessary because of the requirement to sustain community support in order to attract new recruits and to play to the main foreign sources of funding. “Innocent” casualties were usually justified in terms not unlike those used in recent NATO operations, with discussions of proportionality and collateral damage. Where such casualties were actually sought, this was often a reflection of the venom of a particular leader, an act of revenge, or a desire to illicit a specific response from the security forces, wider community, or political decision makers. In later years, politics significantly influenced targeting, particularly in regard to the impact of actions on the electoral prospects of Sinn Fein. This could go either way and, notably, Sinn Fein’s electoral performance actually improved during periods of intensified IRA activity.

### **Attacks of Mass Destruction**

For the reasons outlined above, the leadership of the PIRA and ETA have historically determined that attacks that inflict mass casualties are likely be counterproductive and have therefore rejected such tactics. Nonetheless, in terms of the destructive power of their attacks and the high profile targets attacked (excluding September 11, 2001), both the IRA and the ETA have proved equally effective and deadly as al Qaeda, Hamas, and Hezbollah. For example, the IRA has devastated Europe’s leading financial district—London—twice in one month, causing over \$4 billion worth of damage. It has assassinated one member of the royal Family and tried to kidnap another, and it has conducted several high-profile attacks on the UK government, coming dangerously close to killing Margaret Thatcher and most of her cabinet. It has also killed over 500 members of the police and army, as well as over 2,000 civilians. The ETA has been similarly successful, assassinating one prime minister and almost killing another. The study team has little doubt that several senior leaders of both groups would order an attack that killed hundreds or even thousands if they felt it would further their cause. Considering and rejecting such attacks purely

out of self-interest suggests that these leaders are just as morally bankrupt as the leadership of al Qaeda.

### **Operational Selection Process**

Despite the fact that terrorist methods of operations are well known, some aspects of the tactics adopted by both the PIRA and ETA are worthy of closer scrutiny. For both groups, the geographic location of the target, the political value of that target, and the degree of difficulty in attacking it usually determine the preferred attack option. Other factors taken into account include the ability to maintain operational security and the availability of adequate withdrawal options during the escape phase. Hence the move by both groups to exploit remotely initiated attacks (mortars and bombs) and disposable weapons that allow for a quick getaway. The PIRA, for example, deliberately discarded the RPG-7 in favor of improvised disposable antivehicle weapons (Mk-12/16 mortar) for that reason.

Another key factor in the selection of attack options is the personal preference of the leader of a particular cell or subnetwork. Most commanders have favored methods of attack and can become quite predictable as a result. Some cells may also be limited in their attack options by default because they lack certain weapons or skilled personnel. Other cells, such as Spec Ops teams, are actually formed only to conduct a specific attack or certain type of operation (e.g., sniping). The acquisition of a particular capability can also be a key factor that influences operational methods. Once a new weapon has been acquired, cells often seek to identify targets and vulnerabilities that the weapon can be used against.

The impact of geography (urban or rural) can be seen in the different types of attack options favored and the weapons developed specifically for the purpose. In urban areas, attacks against fixed installations are more difficult because approach routes can be monitored and protected. The IRA has therefore usually relied upon good intelligence to identify weaknesses in the security cordon in order to deliver very large vehicle-borne explosive devices. Urban areas also offer numerous opportunities to mount ambushes against vehicles and foot patrols with a reasonable expectation of escape. Urban cells have therefore utilized such weapons as the improvised hand grenade and small arms to attack army and police foot patrols, and the antivehicle Mk-12/16 mortars to attack armored vehicles and convoys. In the countryside, cells generally prefer to carry out long-range sniping attacks, conduct multiweapon “shoots” against isolated vehicles and patrols, or use the Mk-15-type improvised heavy mortar to launch remotely initiated stand-off attacks on police stations and army bases.

For both groups vehicle bombs remain a favored option for large-scale attacks on high-value targets. That said, the sophistication of such operations has increased significantly since both groups first used crude vehicle bombs in the early 1970s. Another method of attack utilized by most PIRA and ETA cells is assassination. Such operations may be conducted at a distance by a sniper; at very short range, usually with two shooters firing at point blank range; and remotely by victim-initiated under-vehicle bombs. Both groups have also conducted a number of kidnappings, mostly to extort money from the family or employer of the hostage. Perhaps the most famous kidnap victim of the PIRA was the racehorse Shagar.

In the past, both groups have identified targets that cannot be attacked with existing capabilities. Each has therefore invested time and effort in order to devise a suitable strategy and/or developed an effective weapon in order to prosecute such an attack. On occasion, the time lag between identifying a target and creating the means to attack it can be months and even years. One such attack typifies the determination, patience, ingenuity, and resourcefulness of a terrorist organization like the PIRA. The IRA had long sought a way of attacking one of the British army's permanent fortified vehicle checkpoints, which had for many years successfully limited north-south road movement. Eventually they came up with a cunning plan. From good intelligence they discovered that although unauthorized vehicular access to one particular Checkpoint (CP) was almost impossible, a nearby rail line that ran parallel with the CP had been left unprotected. The PIRA therefore filled a light truck with over a thousand pounds of home-made explosives, which had been mixed specifically for this operation. That vehicle was driven close to the target, fitted with rail bogies in situ, and then lifted onto the rail track using a stolen crane. Once lowered onto the track, the vehicle was then rolled down a slight decline towards the CP. When it had reached the CP, the bomb was detonated by a command wire, which had automatically spooled out the back of the vehicle. A "spotter" located some distance away on a hillside coordinated the detonation. The CP was destroyed, killing one soldier. In all, over 40 PIRA personnel may have played a role in mounting the operation—on the ground, in the attack party, providing a screen to alert the team to a security force counterattack, or on the preparation team.

This attack would have been audacious as described, but this particular operation was compromised to a degree, and the PIRA suspected as much. The method of attack was known, inasmuch as it was a large vehicle-borne device, as was the intended target. When the PIRA team conducted what appeared to be a full dry run, the authorities thought that this was the real attack and deployed their counterattack teams. An army team was spotted by one of the PIRA screen and the dry run was called off. However, a few days later the authorities were warned again

that the operation would go forward, and measures were taken to prevent the attack and to interdict the PIRA team. The CP was evacuated, except for one soldier who remained to guard the rear of the facility. Despite a significant security force presence, the PIRA operation proceeded, resulting in the death of the remaining soldier and the escape of all the terrorists. This attack had everything and was a wake-up call, reminding everyone that the PIRA remained a deadly threat despite many security force successes.

### **Summary of Critical Factors—Methods of Operations**

- Irrespective of ethnic background and ideology, most terrorist groups conduct broadly similar types of operations with differences limited largely to sophistication, scale, and the specific weapons used.
- The PIRA and ETA have rejected conventional suicide operations, not least because experienced and well-trained volunteers are too valuable to waste and because both groups have been able to penetrate secure locations without having to resort to this tactic.
- Both groups have also rejected suicide bombers or the killing of large numbers of victims. Still, some leaders would probably do so without hesitation if it would further the cause.
- The PIRA, in particular, has demonstrated the ability to conduct attacks of mass destruction and it could be argued that 9/11 apart, the most financially devastating terrorist attacks ever conducted were perpetrated by the PIRA.
- Several key factors determine what attack options are selected: location, value and vulnerability of the target, operational security considerations and escape options, preferences of cell leaders, resources available, and function of the cell.
- To ensure that volunteers have a reasonable chance of escape, both the PIRA and the ETA favor remotely initiated standoff attacks and hit-and-run operations.
- The assassination of vulnerable individuals remains a favored tactic using snipers, close-in hits and booby traps.
- For specific operations, the PIRA has been able to develop a range of improvised stand-off and disposable weapons and sophisticated remote initiation devices to get the job done.

- These terrorist groups, despite having to exist in a hostile operating environment, have still been able to organize, train, and equip to conduct multiphase attacks utilizing dozens of deployed personnel against hard targets.
- Having selected a particular target, terrorists have shown their willingness to wait months and even years until conditions are right to attack it:
- Terrorists have also shown their willingness to continue to attack the same type of target until the desired effect has been achieved.

## **Lessons Learned**

### **Never Underestimate an Adversary**

It is all too easy to underestimate the terrorist adversary. Their skills base is significantly inferior to that of a regular military and they can often look like an undisciplined rabble. Nonetheless, they have proved capable of conducting well-coordinated multiphase operations that require a considerable degree of patience, determination, and bravery. Terrorist operations are usually viewed as cowardly but most terrorist operations involve a significant degree of risk, either of capture or worse. Even those terrorists who, with little or no immediate risk to themselves, order or execute operations against civilian targets are well aware that they will be pursued by the authorities, and may well be killed, or captured and subjected to robust interrogation techniques. Adversaries that are willing to take such risks should never be underestimated, no matter what is thought about their motives or cause.

### **Maintain Effective Security**

Terrorists are constantly seeking loopholes in protective security measures in order to prosecute their attacks. More often than not they are far more imaginative and resourceful than those tasked to protect against them. All too often protective security tasks are assigned to the least able, motivated, and thorough personnel. There is also a very real danger that complacency can set in, eroding security standards. All evidence suggests that terrorists are constantly reviewing the security measures at targets of interest and can act quickly as soon as vulnerability is detected. Antiterrorist measures must therefore be under constant review, and vigilance maintained.

### **Continually Train and Educate Counterterrorist Forces**

Terrorists are often happy to pursue tried and trusted methods of attack and, sadly, they are still able to achieve surprise. Ongoing education of all vulnerable personnel, law enforcement officers, and military personnel is therefore essential, as lessons can be quickly forgotten, especially in units with a high turnover of personnel.

### **Retain Corporate Knowledge**

Units and personnel deployed in high threat environments develop an in-depth and often instinctive understanding of the threat in their area of responsibility (AOR). As all terrorist and insurgent cells differ from each other for the reasons outlined earlier in this report, this local knowledge is vital and must be recorded and retained. Detailed after-action reports, incident logs, and unit and command diaries must be maintained and passed on to a relieving unit. At the very least, NCOs and officers should be debriefed prior to exiting the theatre of operations to ensure that the unit's corporate knowledge base is retained for posterity.

### **Analyze Operational Patterns**

One of the best methods for determining what types of operations a particular cell or group will undertake is to examine the cell's (and individual terrorist's) operational history and profile. Such pattern analysis may well indicate what methods of attack particular groups and leaders favor and will repeat. Analysis of the weapons a cell has available to it (if known) may also suggest likely methods of operation.

## **THE PLANNING AND TARGETTING PROCESS**

### **Operational Planning Process**

Larger PIRA units have a dedicated operations officer (Ops Offr) and it is usually this individual's responsibility to undertake or direct operational planning. The level of autonomy he has depends on how much his Officer Commanding (OC) is willing to delegate. In smaller groups and cells, the OC usually undertakes this task himself. Typically, the Ops Offr is informed of potential targets and vulnerabilities by cell members or he may direct the intelligence officer and others to conduct surveillance to locate potential targets and vulnerabilities, which can then be attacked. Such "research" might be conducted speculatively or for a specific reason—for example, to find a target for a particular weapon type.

### **Target Selection Decision Process**

The clandestine nature of terrorist activity and the imperative of security caused the PIRA to be very early exponents of what is now broadly called "mission command." The difficulty and dangers of communicating between leaders at different levels required that each commander understood his commander's intent in order that he could operate without constant reference up the chain. Consequently, each level of leadership would typically advise subordinate commanders on what freedom they have to select and attack particular types of targets. They also would have informed cell and subgroup leaders as to which types of operations require a higher level of

authority. At the higher levels of the movement, the final decision would rest with the OC and Ops Offr (depending on the grouping, the nature of the relationship between the two at the relevant level, and the nature of the target).

At times, cells would be directed to attack a given type of target (e.g., commercial infrastructure, security force contractors or Protestants) or attack with a given type of weapon (e.g., Mk-15 heavy mortar, Mk-12/16s antivehicle mortar, or various types of remotely controlled improvised explosive devices). These periods usually reflected the rare occasions during which senior leadership attempted to shape activity in order to achieve a given outcome (e.g., an overreaction from the Protestant community or UK government, or to exploit a temporary technical or tactical advantage). Cells have on occasion also been directed to avoid specific targets, for example “sectarian” attacks.

In later years, and certainly from the mid- to late-1980s, subordinate groups were given greater control of activities to achieve a desired impact or result. This was most clearly evident during the period leading up to the first cease-fire (1994) and particularly following the return to violence between the cease-fires. In that latter period, the PIRA attempted to introduce a centralized target approval process because of the potential strategic impact of tactical-level actions, but this proved both dangerous and unworkable. A refined form of mission command was therefore introduced with very clear and explicit mission statements being issued and subordinate commanders warned of severe sanctions if they operated outside of these parameters. The ETA typically retained centralized command of all operations including targeting decisions. However, recent setbacks have encouraged even this group to delegate such decisions to subordinate commanders.

### **Intelligence Support**

Each and every volunteer is trained to be an intelligence collector and would therefore be alert to any target displaying what he or she believed to be vulnerability. This would be reported into the system, usually to the Ops Officer or, in larger brigades, through the Intel Officer to the Ops Officer, who would determine whether the vulnerability could be exploited and who should mount an attack. Above this level of shared responsibility, dedicated individuals or teams also might be tasked by the OC or Ops Officer to gather intelligence on a given specific target or target type. Additionally, at the brigade level and above, dedicated intelligence officers would deploy surveillance or targeting teams. The terrorist intelligence network can include sympathizers who are able to observe targets, be it at work or from their home area; and agents or sleepers whose occupations afford them access to details relating to a target, such as elements of the commercial and administrative infrastructure. Experts

capable of exploiting information technology have also been used to bug locations and communications systems. Certain Spec-ops teams are self-contained and have their own dedicated intelligence gathering or targeting team(s). Over time, target “folders” may be produced, which will be exploited as and when the opportunity presents itself or a suitable weapon becomes available.

### **Summary of Critical Factors—Target Selection**

- The operational planning process is usually undertaken by a cell or subgroup leader at the lower levels and by dedicated operations officers or specialized teams at the higher levels of the network.
- To maintain security, the leaders of a cellular terrorist group exercise a form of mission command. Subordinate commanders are informed as to which types of targets they can select and attack and which require higher approval. Once informed of the limits of their authority they are often allowed a considerable degree of personal control over the target selection process.
- Direction of subordinate commanders may also include instructions to attack a particular type of target or to utilize a certain type of weapon.
- Centralized control of the targeting process, without a significant risk of compromise, has proven difficult if not impossible to implement either by the PIRA or ETA.
- All terrorists and many of their supporters and sympathizers are intelligence collectors and are always alert to potential targets and vulnerabilities.
- Larger terrorist groups are also able to deploy dedicated intelligence teams capable of undertaking effective target surveillance and even technical or physical penetration.

### **Lessons Learned**

#### **Be Alert to Changes in Terrorists Activities**

At the simplest level, observation of terrorist planning requires sharp situational awareness on the part of all members of the security forces, not just the intelligence staff. Everyone must be alert to the absence of the normal and the presence of the abnormal. This requires an intimate understanding of an AOR, permanent presence and maintenance of a corporate knowledge base.

#### **Avoid Predictability**

Essential to all overt force activity is unpredictability in order to minimize vulnerability while increasing security concerns for the terrorist. Commanders must



understand that the terrorist is able to detect patterns of activity and develop targeting strategies to exploit predictable behavior.

### **Spot the Spotters**

Very few terrorist attacks are carried out without some preliminary intelligence being gathered on the target and this may well include extensive surveillance of the target over an extended period. It is therefore essential that all vulnerable units undertake regular anti surveillance operations in order to deter, disrupt or interdict the terrorists target selection process.

## **TERRORIST TRAINING**

Most terrorists do not need a high degree of training to carry out most types of attacks. For example, delivery of an Mk-15 improvised hand grenade needs only minimal familiarization with the operation of the weapon and the tactic for its use. The only specific requirement is for the volunteer to have been green booked and therefore trusted. Overall, the level of training provided to a volunteer is dependent upon the type of operation, quality of volunteer, specific role in the operation, and the perception of security and risk. Training could therefore vary from minimal to significant. The degree of training and preparation given to volunteers is also dependent upon the relevant commander—some being more meticulous than others—and on the intensity of operations being mounted by a cell.

For most terrorist groups who do not have the luxury of secure training camps in remote “failed” states, there is no opportunity and frankly no operational need to run large numbers of operatives through a quasi-military basic training program. The only essential prerequisite for a volunteer is a total commitment to the cause. For the PIRA volunteer, indoctrination usually begins well before joining the movement, starting within the family, community, school, or church and continuing through a formalized induction process (green-booking) and thereafter largely through a process of group socialization. Once committed to the cause, volunteers only have to be provided with basic orientation and that level of training required to fulfill their role in the organization. For many, this training is limited to rudimentary instruction from cell leaders and more experienced volunteers, followed by on-the-job training. Training actually increased during cease-fire periods partly to exploit reduced security force interdiction and partly to keep volunteers busy.

For those allocated to an ASU, a more advanced level of basic training may be provided. This might include general weapons skills, basic tactics, and specialized training for a specific task. Thereafter, general skills are refined largely on operations. Those that survive will naturally become more experienced and may then

be given additional training, usually at a centralized training event held at a secret location. For a more complex multiphase operation, preparatory training, including full-scale dry runs, might be provided, but for many operations, security concerns ensure that almost no specific training can be undertaken. A core of individuals would therefore plan these operations and volunteers with the required skills would be brought together shortly prior to the attack and briefed on their part before being launched into it. It is important to note that many terrorist attacks require more in the way of situation awareness than specific weapon-related skills.

The creation of Spec op teams capable of conducting specific types of operations provided threefold benefits: (1) enhanced operational security, (2) focused training requirements, and (3) increased competency of the organization to conduct certain types of attack. Even within a Spec op team each member would receive different levels of training, depending on individual roles. Specific formalized technical training would only be provided to a very small number of the most able volunteers. For example, within a sniper team, only the shooter might receive the necessary marksmanship and weapons familiarity training.

### **In-house Training**

Training in brigade or battalion areas is usually conducted by the local experts in a specific discipline, e.g., sniping, laying a Mk-12 mortar, or arming and locating an improvised explosive device. Such training would be conducted in safe houses, or safe areas. It should be remembered that after more than three decades of conflict both the PIRA and to a lesser extent the ETA have a significant pool of experienced volunteers who can provide that training. All instructors have gained most of their experience in the field; this is no suggestion that “them that can do and them that can’t teach.”

All training activities are operations in themselves, requiring extensive preparation and tight operational security. A dicker screen often is deployed to provide security for a training event. The PIRA, in particular, also appears to have operated a “train the trainer” program. A particular cell might receive training on a new weapon, for example, a new IED, or means of initiating an IED. The knowledge and experience gained by this cell would then be cascaded outward, first to the other cells in the brigade and eventually to the whole of Northern Command.

### **Safe Havens and Third Parties**

To conduct more advanced training or circumvent tight security in the North, the PIRA would shift to the Republic of Ireland, its safe haven for many years. Similarly, the ETA would conduct training in France without much fear of

interference from the French authorities until relatively recently. For the PIRA, the majority of this training appears to have been conducted in the border counties, though training on certain new systems and for some technical skills was conducted deeper in the Republic. Some fixed facilities, including underground weapons ranges located in remote areas of the South, are known to have been constructed to support this training.

Unlike al Qaeda, the PIRA and ETA do not run permanent training camps. Instead, they organize ad hoc training events in their safe havens. In the case of the PIRA, such events might be set up by a brigade and training would be provided by experts from the volunteers' own area, with the relevant Southern Command cell merely assisting by providing a suitable location and security. Alternatively, specific training might be offered by Southern Command personalities. On these occasions, volunteers from different cells and brigades might attend (e.g., explosives officers and IED men).

There is also evidence of PIRA volunteers training abroad in North Africa, North and South America, and parts of Europe. This training was provided either with the agreement of the host country or by an indigenous terrorist group. Both the ETA and IRA are known to have utilized legitimate training facilities in the UK, Spain, and abroad to acquire specific technical skills or basic weapons skills that cannot be acquired in the UK or Spain. For example, it has been suggested that volunteers have improved their weapons skills at commercial schools and ranges in the United States.

### **Training Indicators**

There are a number of passive and active indicators of training taking place. Passive indicators include the absence of certain individuals from one group, or of similarly skilled individuals from a number of groups at the same time. Active indicators include the detection of certain types of activity in areas usually used for training, for example, the presence of dicker screens, and reports of explosions and small arms fire in areas where no attacks have been reported. Indicators that training already has occurred can include sudden improvements in the operational effectiveness of a cell or subnetwork, the appearance and successful deployment of new weapons, or changes in methods of operation.

### **Summary of Critical Factors—Training**

- Most terrorist activities require minimal training.

- The majority of volunteers are employed in supporting roles or on simple operations. Providing even basic training for these individuals is not necessary or cost-effective.
- Even for more complex operations, the majority of those involved do not require even the most basic military skills. Only those who actually would conduct a technical aspect of an operation would require and get the necessary additional training.
- Indoctrination of the volunteer, orientation, and situational awareness are much more important than training per se.
- Even within ASUs and Spec Ops teams, only those individuals who needed particular skills would actually get it. There is usually little or no cross training.
- Brigade staff and cell members with the appropriate skills and experience conduct most training in-house. Thereafter, most training for low-level support staff and cell members is conducted on the job.
- For the purposes of training, dedicated al Qaeda-style camps are a luxury that most groups cannot afford and don't actually need in order to train effectively for the types of operations they are likely to mount. Instead, both the PIRA and the ETA would organize ad hoc training events usually conducted in safe havens in the Republic of Ireland and France.
- The availability of safe havens has been critical to the success of both groups, particularly in the early years.
- Training and logistics support from pariah states like Libya and Serbia and other terrorist groups have also been vital, particularly during the early years.
- Terrorist groups have exploited legitimate commercial and academic training programs, especially for technical specialists.
- Eventually, any terrorist group will build up enough in-house training knowledge and experience to make reliance on external support unnecessary.

## **Lessons Learned**

### **Understand that Terrorists can do much with Little Training**

Given that most terrorist operations are relatively simple and do not require significant skill levels, most volunteers clearly only need minimal training. Likewise, most members of an ASU or Spec Ops team only need training for their specific task. Providing bare bones training is therefore cost-effective for the terrorists and reduces

the profile of any training program thereby improving the security of the group. Thus, for the terrorist at least, less really is more. An authority cannot afford to underestimate the capabilities of a terrorist because training appears to be minimal and ad hoc in nature.

Some experts have dismissed the threat posed by the PIRA and the ETA when compared with al Qaeda, in part because of the apparent difference between the training regimes of the groups. It is important to remember, however, that both the PIRA and the ETA have been able to develop cost-effective training organizations, capable of producing significant numbers of highly competent operatives, under the very noses of the British and Spanish authorities, without need for the sophisticated training infrastructure created by al Qaeda. It is conceivable, then, that dismantling al Qaeda's camps will not necessarily diminish its operational effectiveness in the longer term. By following the PIRA/ETA model, al Qaeda can do as much or more with much less.

### **Denying Safe Havens**

Like al Qaeda, both the PIRA and the ETA have benefited greatly from access to safe havens beyond the direct control of the UK or Spanish authorities. These safe havens have not however been in failed or failing states but in western democracies. In order to win any war against terrorism, it is clear that these safe havens must be denied to the terrorist. That means securing international cooperation and then maintaining it. Only with the support of the Republic of Ireland and France have the UK and Spanish authorities been able to close off these countries as terrorist sanctuaries. Gaining the support of countries that have large ethnic communities within their borders, e.g., the Irish American community, is also vital.

### **Disrupt Terrorist Training**

The single most effective way of inhibiting terrorist training activity is with intelligence-led operations. Security force penetration of a terrorist movement will enhance knowledge of planned training and enable deterrence, disruption or interdiction operations to be mounted. Penetration of more senior levels might identify terrorists who conduct specialized training. Access to the QM chain may indicate the arrival of new weapons that would require training. Surveillance may indicate activity on the ground or the absence of individuals, both indications that training is ongoing. The most effective means of disrupting training events is denial of movement in or through an area by a combination of various overt and covert patrolling techniques employed unpredictably. Such operations should be preplanned and on call at short notice in the event that indicators of training are detected.

## **Understand and Recognize the Home-Grown Ideology**

Commitment to the cause is far more important than training for any terrorist. Much has been made of use of the Afghanistan camps to indoctrinate and train volunteers. While this was certainly the case, the loss of these camps does not mean that mass indoctrination cannot still continue. Both the PIRA and ETA have been able to radicalize recruits without access to these camps. Many of these recruits have been sufficiently committed to the cause to risk and give their lives, using such tactics as hunger strike. All of this was achieved without camps or a strong belief in the afterlife. It therefore follows that al Qaeda will continue to attract and radicalize recruits via the same means: schools, mosques, families and communities, and through group socialization.

## **INTERNAL SECURITY—THE UNKNOWNNS**

The PIRA in the early 1970s was extremely vulnerable to security force penetration and surveillance operations. Its operational security was poor and there was no leader or cell tasked with developing, promulgating, or implementing effective operational security procedures. The first person to recognize the need for a formal security organization was Gerry Adams and within the Belfast Brigade, which he then controlled, he introduced a shadowy cell of security officers identified only as the “unknownns.” When Adams finally took control of the whole movement, this development was formalized and a dedicated Security department was established, answerable only to the PIRA GHQ. Similar security teams were established at the lower level, and in the larger more formally structured units, adjutants were appointed as security officers.

### **PIRA Internal Security Department**

The GHQ Internal Security Department comprises much feared specialist teams, which have the remit to investigate any security breach and review operational security measures across the organization. At the sub-network level, the adjutant might also have his own security team to investigate his own fears and suspicions. GHQ security teams are trained to undertake patient and thorough investigations of both successes and failures, seeking to identify patterns and indicators of possible penetration. If penetration were suspected, a specific investigation would be instigated in order to find out whom the informer might be. Such investigations have been known to run for years and can be highly complex. Decoy operations might be run, changing membership of a suspect ASU one volunteer at a time or using certain combinations of members, which would eventually highlight the alleged agent. Real and false information also might be disseminated in a “loop-closing” exercise aimed

at identifying when the security forces reacted in a given way, thereby suggesting that they had knowledge of that piece of information. If identified, the informant would be interrogated to determine the degree of damage he or she had inflicted. On occasion, a formal courtmartial would then be convened. If the accused was found guilty, punishment was usually death. Security teams might also attempt to run counterintelligence disinformation operations in order to pass false information to the security forces.

These security teams also conduct random investigations and speculative surveillance of volunteers' life styles. Technical security has become more prominent over the years as the terrorist develops an understanding of the threat. The security teams are therefore tasked to sweep buildings, vehicles, and areas of ground for remote surveillance devices. Volunteers are trained to resist interrogation lectures, and the security teams devote considerable effort to debriefing arrested volunteers to determine if they have been "turned" and to learn everything they can about what the government security forces knew and the interview techniques they employed.

### **Operational Security**

Within the wider movement, normal countersurveillance drills are employed during operational movement, or randomly as a screen to the real events. Attempts are also made to impose a rigid need-to-know system, whereby cell members only have knowledge of their specific part of the operation, and then perhaps only late in the day. Plans, previously briefed, may also have details changed at the last minute or in real time. Operations, certainly the larger ones, operate with a dicking screen, which will clear and secure an area or a route prior to the entry of the attack team. A mobile phone may be carried for alerting purposes or for other critical communications. For larger operations, CB radio is still necessary to give orders and to alert the group to security concerns. Overall, terrorists' situational awareness is generally high, and their aim is to identify the absence of the normal and presence of the abnormal in order to detect possible surveillance by security forces. Where that is suspected, a few streets or a larger area may be put under surveillance by terrorist security teams in order to try and identify hostile activity. Significant effort has also been devoted to eliminating any forensic trail that might lead back to the individual or group. Gloves are worn routinely and all clothes are washed or burned immediately after an operation. Those involved will also take a shower or bath often in bleach to remove any residue from an operation. To provide further separation these activities are often undertaken at safe houses. It is safe to say that no PIRA team would have left the trail of evidence found after 9/11.

## **Summary of Critical Factors—Internal Security**

- Operational Security in terrorist movements is often poor in the early stages of its evolution.
- The creation of an internal security organization significantly improves the operational security of a terrorist organization.
- The methods used by the internal security organization can be extreme, and punishments can range from expulsion to execution.
- In time, operational security also improves within the wider movement with countersurveillance drills, the need-to-know process, and security screens becoming the norm for all operations.

## **Lessons Learned**

### **Strike Early**

Terrorist movements can be highly vulnerable to penetration in the early stages of their development. However, unless the authorities can strike decisively and early, terrorists will learn their lessons and a much more effective internal security regime will eventually be implemented. It is therefore vital that the necessary technical intelligence and HUMINT capabilities are maintained and ready to be deployed as soon as a new threat emerges.

### **Penetrate Internal Security**

The internal security arm of a terrorist group like the PIRA will develop an intimate understanding of all aspects of the organization—its structure, membership, and capabilities. A concerted effort to identify and “turn” one of the “unknowns,” as security officers are called, will therefore pay dividends and can seriously destabilize a group.

### **Exploit Fear**

The methods used and the power of internal security teams can create a climate of fear within the group. Almost certainly, suspicion will erroneously fall on loyal members of the movement, and punishments will create a sense of resentment and even a desire for revenge. The punishment or disappearance of suspected informers or collaborators can also alienate the wider community. These anxieties and enmities can be exploited to turn other members of the group or as ammunition in the war of ideas.



## **TERRORIST FINANCING**

Securing adequate funding is critical to the success of any terrorist organization, and a shortage of funds will negatively impact on every aspect of operations, from recruitment to procurement and all functions in between. Very few terrorist groups have ever had an abundance of cash with which to fund their activities. They have therefore sought to exploit every possible avenue for fundraising. It should be remembered, however, that even relatively large groups such as the PIRA do not need huge sums of money in order to present a significant threat. It is estimated, for example, that this group can remain operational on as little as \$10 million per annum and highly effective with an income of less than \$25 million per annum.

### **Community Support**

A terrorist group that can secure and maintain community support for its activities will have access to a substantial source of revenue. Moreover, this source will be extremely difficult for the authorities to interdict directly. Only a more holistic campaign that separates the terrorists from this constituency will eventually reduce the flow of money from such sources. Initial popular affinity for the PIRA afforded them considerable financial support as well as active or tacit support to operations. In its simplest form, such support came from more or less voluntary 'collections' made in the Catholic estates and at Republican political and social venues. For most of the period, the Republicans also ran a network of social clubs (bar takings, raffles, gaming machines, etc.) from which a percentage of all monies went to the cause. Support to PIRA prisoners, the "men behind the wire" and their families, was also a major motivation for contributions. A lower level of financial support was also provided by Republicans living across the border in the Republic of Ireland. Eventually, however, community support from both sides of the border was eroded and with it a substantial amount of funding. The ETA continues to draw much of its funding from supporters within the Basque Nationalist community in both Spain and to a lesser extent France, although this constituency too has been much reduced by effective Spanish government action.

### **Crime**

Extortion and protection rackets have long been employed by the ETA and PIRA to raise funds. Major stores and large businesses, as well as smaller employers, are known to have been intimidated into participating in such schemes in order to protect their businesses from the inevitable consequences. In the Basque region this is even known as the "ETA Tax." Thefts from banks and post offices have regularly

been used to boost the coffers, as have various schemes to defraud the UK and European Union authorities. For example, smuggling and counterfeiting have netted both groups considerable amounts of money. Over time these scams have become more sophisticated and more lucrative. Kidnapping has also been used on occasion to secure substantial ransoms. Such criminal activity has been and will continue to be a major source of revenue for terrorist groups.

### **International Support**

Foreign fundraising has always been an important element of terrorist financing. For the PIRA, the most lucrative areas were the United States and Australia, where there were/are very large and until recently sympathetic Irish immigrant communities. The other major source of international support was from foreign governments or organizations seeking to fund terrorism in general or attacks against the UK in particular. Libya is the best-known case in point. During the early 1980s, it provided the PIRA with over 250 tons of arms and explosives, worth an estimated \$90 million. Likewise, the ETA was able to secure similar support from various Marxist groups in Central and South America and possibly from the former Soviet Union during the Cold War.

### **Financial Management**

In the early stages of their campaigns, the financial management of both groups was chaotic and the unit, that raised the money usually held on to it. This meant there was little or no centralized control over how the money was spent and only a limited ability to reallocate the funds within the organization. Centralized control was therefore introduced over time, with both the raising of funds and control thereof eventually becoming a major aspect of higher command activity. As with other vital activities and high-value resources, the PIRA eventually moved this function offshore to the Republic of Ireland, where the operating environment was far more permissive. As with most other illegal enterprises, terrorist financing functioned predominantly as a cash economy, and it was not unusual for brigade members to be reported traversing the border with substantial amounts of cash. As the complexity of PIRA financing increased, so too did the involvement of accountants and “business brains.” These experts further refined the management of PIRA finances to include well-run, legitimate organizations that were designed to furnish clean money or launder cash. Such companies were established both north and south of the border and abroad.

## **Summary of Critical Factors—Terrorist Financing**

- Funding is a critical element of any terrorist campaign, and without access to an adequate and steady flow of money, the scale and intensity of any campaign is bound to decrease.
- While funding is critical, it is worth remembering that a terrorist campaign can still be mounted with a very limited budget, for example, an annual income of \$25 million would sustain the PIRA at a high tempo of operations.
- Sympathizers and supporters can make substantial voluntary donations to terrorist movements, and this support cannot be stopped by law enforcement action alone.
- Disconnecting a terrorist organization from its support base is critical to the success of any campaign to disrupt terrorist finances.
- Criminal activities can net terrorists significant sums of money.
- International support from immigrant communities living abroad is another significant source of terrorist funding.
- At various times, both the PIRA and ETA have enjoyed the largesse of like-minded terrorist groups and certain pariah states willing to fund terrorist activities.

## **Lessons Learned**

### **Cut off Funding, Domestically and Abroad**

In the same way that US law enforcement agencies have focused on gangsters through their financial irregularities, one of the most effective ways to damage a terrorist organization over time is to attack and close its sources of funding. For this undertaking, the authorities should establish a specific task force comprising an eclectic mix of appropriate professionals with extensive accounting, auditing, legal, and investigative experience. Where such teams have been created their impact has been highly significant.

### **Be Alert to Financial Intelligence**

To achieve the desired results, the financial task force must be provided with extensive information about the terrorist group, its activities, and its financial infrastructure. Such information cannot be collected only by the intelligence agencies; all organizations and individuals involved in counterterrorism must be alert to information, which can be used by the financial investigators. For example, overt forces in the normal conduct of their duties may discover useful low-level information

relating to terrorists' financial details. Even noticing that a known terrorist is driving a new car may be an indication of financial activity that the financial investigators could exploit.

### **Involve All Agencies with Relevant Responsibilities**

This approach serves to emphasize the importance of a multiagency focus on the financial and criminal activities of terrorist network. While a specialized finance unit will be the point weapon, other organizations must also be involved, for example, the Justice Department, Customs, and the Internal Revenue Service.

Funding from other states that sponsor terrorism or from other terrorist groups can be deterred by making it too risky due to real or perceived security problems within the receiving movement or the route through which the funds would have to be channeled. Foreign governments may also be discouraged by threats to expose them as state sponsors of terrorism with attendant risk of international sanction.

## **TERRORIST LOGISTICS**

### **The QM Department**

Within the PIRA, the GHQ's QM department, headed by the Quarter Master General (QMG) had ultimate responsibility for the procurement, transportation, storage, maintenance, issue, and recovery of all weapons and materiel. This department is one of the most tightly controlled within the movement and the QMG has held considerable power over the years, with some activities conducted without even the Provisional Army Council having full visibility. The QMG has his own staff, or can rely on trusted agents whom he could call upon for special procurement operations. Each Command (North and South) had its own Command Quarter Master, and below that level, each brigade also had its own QM.

Knowledge of the locations of weapons dumps/caches was held strictly within the QM chain. In order to protect this knowledge, the relevant QM would personally organize the collection of weapons from dumps and then move this material to an operational or transit cache prior to use. On occasion, the QM would actually hand over weapons directly to an ASU or Spec Op team. A variety of different locations have been used to hide weapons and material, and each QM has a favored option. The same applies to the movement of material to and from the dumps—each QM has preferred methods. An important criterion for the selection of a dump/cache is the ability to observe the location in order to detect security force activity. From the late 1980s onward, larger caches have been stored in the Republic of Ireland, where the chances of detection traditionally have been much lower. Although the QM

department is compartmentalized from the movement, knowledge within the QM chain has traditionally been exchanged quite freely.

### **Engineering and R&D Departments**

Within the PIRA, and to a lesser extent the ETA, the manufacture of improvised weaponry was a separate activity from the QM department and was undertaken either by a dedicated Engineering team or by the Research and Development (R&D) department. These entities pioneered the development and large-scale production of a wide range of relatively sophisticated weaponry and explosives that significantly reduced each group's reliance on "imported" weaponry. At times the IRA has had extremely skilled R&D men and weapons designers. The most capable ring was eventually disrupted by a major UK-US operation that deprived the organization of one of its most important men. The product of the PIRA factories and labs would be fed into the QM chain, as required. This ability to manufacture weapons and explosives on an as-needed basis meant that fewer quantities actually had to be stockpiled in detectable dumps and caches. Improvised weapons, devices, and home-made explosives are also much cheaper to manufacture and this has reduced the considerable strain that procurement places on terrorist finances.

Below the departmental level, each larger grouping would have its own trained explosives officer, who could manufacture IEDs from parts provided by the Engineering Department and supervise the mixing of home-made explosives. Certain groupings, because of geographic location and integral engineering skill and facilities, also played a more significant part in the preparation of weapons such as mortars and large IEDs which would then be disseminated to other groups either intact (simply awaiting arming), or in pre-fabricated form, ready for assembly as required. Specific areas around the border (almost always on the ROI side) became renowned for improvised weaponry production and testing.

### **Summary of Critical Factors—Terrorist Logistics**

- Within a mature terrorist movement, very few operational cells retain and store their own weapons and explosives. These are usually held by a dedicated QM department that has overall responsibility for the procurement, transportation, storage, maintenance, issue, and recovery of all weapons and materiel.
- The QM department is one of the mostly tightly controlled entities within a terrorist movement, but knowledge within the QM chain may be shared quite widely.

- The creation of dedicated Engineering and R&D departments will significantly increase the lethality and effectiveness of improvised weapons, initiation devices, and home-made explosives.
- The ability to manufacture, to order, considerable quantities of improvised weaponry lessens the terrorist's reliance on unreliable and vulnerable external sources, decreases funding requirements, and reduces the need to maintain large stockpiles.
- Improvisation is not the last resort of the desperate.

## **Lessons Learned**

### **Penetrate the Weakest Link**

The campaigns against the PIRA, the ETA, and other terrorist groups have consistently demonstrated that tightly controlled compartments are exceptionally secure until they are penetrated. This is because, within the compartment, security is often poor and knowledge is shared widely both laterally and vertically. Therefore, an informant in the QM chain is likely to provide extensive information on the logistics process as well as details of the Engineering, R&D, and Finance departments and the names of many others within the wider movement. High priority should therefore be attached to penetrating the QM chain. As this functional area is so compartmentalized, surveillance of known QM members may well rapidly highlight others in the chain, thereby providing further valuable intelligence.

### **Detect and Observe**

A variety of technologies and capabilities are needed in order to locate and monitor terrorist weapons dumps and caches. This includes human surveillance assets, remote sensors and alarms, and low-level aerial reconnaissance sensors (e.g., visual, thermal, and IRLS). Various means for covertly tagging ("jarking") and deactivating terrorist weapons should also be deployed.

### **Secure International Support**

Although the PIRA and ETA have developed significant capabilities to manufacture improvised weaponry and explosives, considerable quantities of certain types of weapons (e.g., automatic weapons, sniper rifles) still need to be "imported" in order to increase capabilities and to replace losses. International cooperation is essential to stop or at least limit the purchase and shipment of these weapons. Such cooperation must exist on many levels, including the political, judicial, law enforcement, intelligence, and military dimensions.

## **PERCEPTION MANAGEMENT/MEDIA MANIPULATION**

In 1971, Gerry Adams not only became a battalion commander but also secured for himself the appointment of “press officer” for the Belfast brigade. This was a very early indication that the new emerging leadership of the PIRA fully understood the power of the press and the need to manage perceptions. Since that time, the PIRA has organized an increasingly sophisticated campaign intended to convey messages, at different times, to a wide variety of audiences: its own constituency and its supporters in the USA; the British electorate and UK government; business leaders; and the Protestant community. Messages to supporters have sought to inspire and intensify allegiance, discredit the authorities, highlight security force overreaction, provoke hatred and violence, justify actions, explain changes in policy, encourage funding and recruitment, and repair damage resulting from PIRA’s own mistakes and excesses. Similarly, messages to the UK government and British electorate have variously been designed to intimidate and spread fear, to provoke indignation and anger, to justify atrocities, to improve image, promote dialogue, and even to apologize for mistakes.

The PIRA and ETA have also long recognized that the impact of a terrorist attack is magnified significantly if the act or its aftermath is widely reported by the media. Both have therefore sought to manipulate the media to gain the widest coverage of their actions. This has included staging come-on events designed to draw the media into a given area before a major attack is carried out. The types of targets selected and the timing of attacks has also, on occasion, been influenced by the desire to grab the primetime news headlines. Freed from the necessity of having to be accurate or honest, and knowing the timing of most events, the PIRA leadership has all too often managed to grab those headlines and control the media agenda, not least because the security forces and UK politicians will usually refuse to comment on an attack until all details have been confirmed. Notwithstanding the fact that a full answer may be given by the authorities on a subsequent news broadcast, the moment usually is lost to the terrorist as it is their point which has struck home first. The media itself was slow to realize how it was being manipulated, but it does now work within a voluntary framework, at least in the UK.

The importance the PIRA places on perception management is further demonstrated by the considerable resources it has devoted to countering the UK government’s somewhat belated efforts to win the war of ideas. The PIRA also mounted a concerted effort to reverse Margaret Thatcher’s media ban, which contrary to popular opinion did have a negative impact on Sinn Féin in particular. The

Spanish government's media ban on ETA and Batasuna is also judged to have been effective in winning the war of ideas with that group.

### **Summary of Critical Factors—Perception Management**

- Most terrorist groups are early to recognize the power of the press and the importance of developing an effective perception management strategy and capability.
- Both the PIRA and ETA have shown the capability to develop and manage a complex information campaign that produces sophisticated messages aimed at diverse audiences via multiple media channels.
- Both groups have sought to manipulate or exploit the media in order to grab the headlines and ensure the widest coverage for their actions and messages.
- All too often, the authorities have failed to respond quickly to breaking events and have not been adequately prepared to quickly counter terrorist propaganda.

### **Lessons Learned**

#### **Counter PSYOP**

Most terrorists know that they can never hope to militarily defeat their adversary. They recognize that their best chance of victory is to promote feelings of fear, anxiety, stress, and frustration, which may ultimately undermine military morale, public confidence, and political resolve. The terrorists also know that the revulsion, anger, and desire for retribution that violence provokes also serves their purpose, as it can encourage a disproportionate response by the authorities. To achieve these effects it is necessary to gain the widest media coverage for their atrocities and their messages. All successful terrorist groups therefore devote considerable energies to controlling the news agenda, manipulating the media, and crafting and disseminating effective propaganda. In the War Against Terrorism, it is therefore absolutely necessary to seize the initiative from the terrorists and counter their PSYOP effort. Their spokespersons and apologists must be legally silenced, their arguments discredited, and their atrocities highlighted at every opportunity.

#### **Win the War of Ideas**

It is vital that Governments engage in a war of ideas that is intended to counter terrorist propaganda and promote an alternative perspective. This requires a information strategy that is coordinated with and complementary to the wider counterterrorism strategy. Everyone involved in counterterrorism has a role to play in the war of ideas, as attitude, posture, and actions can impact positively or negatively



on the messages being delivered. All mediums must be exploited to reach target audiences, messages must be carefully crafted to have the necessary appeal and to avoid causing offenses, and each message must be expertly delivered to ensure that its impact is maximized. This requires drawing upon the full resources of the State.

### **Deploy Incident Response Teams**

Seizing and maintaining the initiative is a fundamental principle of warfare. Often, however, the terrorists have been able to deliver their message first, either through their actions and/or their spokesperson, long before an official counter statement has been drafted, approved, and authorized. The initial official response to an incident usually begins with a flood of unconfirmed and uncoordinated assessments and comment (often wildly inaccurate) from deployed forces. It is then followed by high-level public condemnation of the atrocity and then by an information vacuum until such time as the “official investigation” is complete. Unfortunately, by the time a detailed statement is actually issued it is usually too late. The terrorist message has already grabbed the headlines and the news focus has moved on. In order to counter this problem it may be sensible to create Rapid Reaction Incident Response teams. These teams can be deployed immediately to the scene of any incident, where they will take control of the initial public information process and conduct a rapid preliminary investigation in order to allow an initial detailed assessment/statement to be issued. Such statements can then begin with “our initial investigation indicates that” rather than the more usual “I cannot comment at this time” or the “matter is under investigation.”

### **Be the First Out with the Bad News**

Terrorists and other adversaries have shown themselves to be particularly adept at exploiting security force accidents, failures, or overreaction and at “spinning” such incidents to gain the maximum positive publicity for themselves and negative publicity for the authorities. These groups have also demonstrated their ability to respond quickly to negative publicity, often providing plausible explanations for their mistakes and failures. In similar circumstances the official position is to deny, prevaricate, or more usually, resort to the default setting of “the matter is under investigation.” British experience in particular has shown that, in the war of ideas, it is invariably better to be the first out with the bad news. It is then possible to provide an explanation that will place a failure or accident into context, thereby avoiding an information vacuum that the terrorists will inevitably fill. For example, if the security forces in a firefight kill a civilian, it is usually better to quickly admit fault, offer expressions of regret, and give assurances that a thorough investigation will occur and compensation will be issued. Then, with the controversy largely suppressed, it is

possible to take the fight to the terrorist by concentrating on the reasons why the civilian was killed in the first place—terrorist action.

## **THE MORAL DIMENSION**

Over the years both the PIRA and the ETA have shown themselves willing to employ almost any means in order to achieve their aims. The need to appeal to, or draw support from, a given constituency at home and abroad has often meant that certain modes of operation have been eschewed. That said there is hardly any course of action that the leadership of either group has not been prepared to take if their methodical cost/benefit analysis process has indicated the outcome will be positive. The PIRA has, for example, allowed—even ordered—volunteers to effectively commit suicide during the hunger strikes; murdered significant numbers of innocent women and children; deployed unwilling “human bombs,” and attacked a Veteran’s Day parade. It has also deployed massive bombs (3,000 pounds plus), which devastated several city centers with only the vaguest of warnings to avoid hundreds of casualties.

When comparing the PIRA and the ETA to al Qaeda, some experts have noted that both groups have not used suicide bombers, or killed very large numbers of civilians. By implication they are fundamentally different. This is often attributed to the ethnic and religious differences between the groups. To a certain extent this is true but misses one very significant point. Both the PIRA and the ETA have only rejected such tactics because of the likely negative impact on their own constituency (for PIRA, at home and in the US) and therefore on the movement in the longer term. When necessary and when leaders have determined that an action is not likely to cause irreparable damage to the aims, almost any tactic has been sanctioned. The only consideration is that each action achieves a given outcome, necessary for the movement and the overall cause. This included undertaking extreme actions, which were intended to provoke an overreaction in order to further radicalize their own community to increase levels of support and recruiting.

The key to the success of both groups has been the leaders’ ability to maintain the aim. Beyond that it has simply been a case of determining the tactics best suited to achieving the aim and protecting the unity/integrity of the movement. If there is one key difference between the PIRA and ETA and al Qaeda, it is that Osama Bin Laden has determined that his support base is more tolerant of mass casualties and more willing to offer up their sons and daughters as suicide bombers, not that he is any more or less violent than the leaders of the PIRA or ETA. In all other respects they are equally murderous and equally morally bankrupt.

## **Summary of Critical Factors—The Moral Dimension**

- All the evidence suggests that the leaders of both the PIRA and the ETA would exploit any tactic, including suicide bombing and attacks inflicting mass casualties, if they determined that such actions would further their aims.
- The main limiting factor on both groups has been the attitudes of the constituencies from which they draw their support. If these constituencies were opposed to particular tactics or excessive levels of violence, then the actions of the group would be limited in order to avoid the risk of alienating that vital support base. Even a group like al'Qaeda must be cognisant of this reality.

## **Lessons Learned**

By fighting a war of ideas with the terrorist, evidence suggests that it might be possible to convince an increasing number of those who have given their support to the group/network that certain or ideally all terrorist actions are immoral, illegal, and—in the context of religious groups—contrary to the teachings of that faith. If the bulk of a traditionally supportive community can be persuaded that all or even just certain levels of terrorist violence are unacceptable, they might begin to withdraw their support. In addition to reducing the effectiveness of the group, this development might also begin to introduce self-imposed constraints on the terrorists themselves. Such an approach is but one of many objectives for a war of ideas but is indeed worthy of consideration as part of the wider War Against Terrorism.

## **CRITERIA FOR SUCCESS**

In determining the success or failure of the current War Against Terrorism, new definitions are urgently needed so that politicians, the public, and the counterterrorism community can make more informed judgments about actual successes and genuine failure. It is also necessary to better understand how the terrorists or insurgents themselves define the success or failure of their campaign.

All too often in this war, there is significant pressure to respond immediately to terrorist attacks—to make arrests and to be seen to be making some progress. Counterterrorism forces can also be sucked into a “body count” mentality, when defining their own success. In reality, in this “long war,” the elimination of a terrorist cell may sometimes count for little, particularly if the community views the methods used as excessive. Equally, the inability to prevent further terrorist attacks cannot necessarily be deemed failure, if the long-term strategy to undermine the group is succeeding. In the end, any activity can only be deemed successful if it contributes positively to a long-term strategy for combating terrorism.

The terrorists themselves define success or failure rather differently than do the authorities. The death or capture of volunteers may have little or no impact on the effectiveness or morale of a group if the group's aims are still being achieved and/or losses made good. A group may therefore continue with its long-term strategy despite numerous short-term setbacks. On the other hand, the frequent capture of small quantities of weapons, confiscation of a few hundred pounds of home-made explosives, or continued recruitment of informants may eventually have a devastating impact on the group, even though such security force successes in themselves may seem insignificant and generate little positive publicity. The group may also deem an apparently successful terrorist attack a failure if it undermines support within its constituency or the long-term aim. The fire-bombing of a hotel in Northern Ireland that resulted in the deaths of more than a dozen civilians, mostly women, was one such attack. The PIRA leadership deemed it a failure because of the widespread condemnation it received. For the terrorist, maintenance of the aim is the primary criterion for determining both success and failure.

### **Summary of Critical Factors—Criteria for Success**

- Traditional definitions of success or failure may not apply in the War against Terrorism.
- Short-term tactical success can actually have a negative impact on the long-term strategy to defeat or eliminate the terrorist threat and may even reinvigorate the terrorist movement if the use of force is disproportionate.
- Terrorist groups like the PIRA have a “long war” strategy and are able to accept/absorb continual tactical failures if the long-term aims of the group are being furthered.
- The immediate inability to prevent terrorist attacks or losses is not a failure as long as a clearly defined long-term counterterrorism strategy is succeeding.

### **Lessons Learned**

#### **Be Committed for the Long Term**

The campaigns against the PIRA and the ETA suggest that the current war against terrorism will last for years and even decades before some sort of satisfactory conclusion is achieved. It is therefore essential that politicians and the public develop a new tolerance for the open-ended nature of such a war. This is vital because both success and failure must be judged only on the basis of the long-term impact that a strategy or tactic has in defeating or eliminating the threat of terrorism. Sadly, short-term benefits may count for little and may even be counterproductive in a long war.

For example, the elimination of a terrorist cell or leader cannot be deemed a success if the methods used further alienate the constituency from which the terrorist group draws its vital support. Time and again a tactical success by the British army reduced the immediate threat only to see the overall level of terrorist activity increase as the army's disproportionate actions drew more community support for the PIRA.

### **Be Patient and Resilient**

An attritional counterterrorism campaign can only succeed once the flow of recruits has been stopped or greatly reduced. That flow of recruits will only decrease when the wider community from which the terrorist group draws its support has been persuaded to reject violence. A strategy to achieve that objective will take many years to succeed. The public, politicians, and the military/law enforcement organizations must therefore be educated to expect setbacks and encouraged to show patience and resilience in the face of repeated tactical failures.

### **Wage Effects-Based Warfare**

Counterterrorism forces must avoid a "body count" mentality when determining success against a terrorist or insurgent adversary. Typically, these groups can absorb significant numbers of casualties (killed or arrested) without any significant impact on morale or effectiveness. There is no military style measure of noncombat effectiveness in a terrorist movement. The group can also tolerate the failure or more usually the abandonment of most operations. The only consideration for the terrorist is whether the long-term aims of the group are being achieved and whether the support of its constituency is being maintained. The campaign against such groups must therefore be "effects-based" and the effects that must be achieved need to be broader than simply the elimination of individual terrorists.

## **SUPPORT BASE**

For terrorist groups, maintenance of its support base is almost as crucial as maintenance of its aims. Without this community support the terrorist campaign will fail because the group's funding will dry up, the flow of recruits will dwindle, and most of its hiding places will be exposed. Separating the terrorist group from this support base is therefore a vital component of any counterterrorism strategy.

### **Background**

In the case of both the PIRA and the ETA, membership of their primary constituency shared a broadly similar ethnic and/or ideological background. Nevertheless, such support is not geographically constrained. The PIRA was able to garner support among Irish Catholic immigrant communities globally, particularly in

the United States and Australia. The nature of the ETA's nationalist and Marxist ideology meant that it was able to secure support across Central and South America. It is interesting to note in this regard that a Basque separatist group was willing to trade on its Latin and Spanish-speaking associations to facilitate such support. To reinforce this common/shared identity both groups went to great lengths to promote themselves as being "from the community" and operating on "behalf of the community."

### **Nature of Support**

The type of support provided to the PIRA and the ETA can be categorized as either active or passive. Active supporters, the "hard core", provide safe houses, collect information, carry messages, provide funding, and are willing to undertake other similar tasks. By doing so, they directly contribute to the operational effectiveness of the group although they are not actually members of the group per se. In reality, however, the bulk of a terrorist group's support base is not active in the movement and is therefore defined in this study as "passive supporters." These individuals do not actually facilitate terrorist activity, other than by making small donations to the cause, but do offer moral support to the group by supporting its aims, condoning some or all of its methods, and turning a blind eye to its activities and presence. By doing so they allow the terrorists to hide and operate within a wider "friendly" community that is difficult for counterterrorism forces to penetrate without detection.

### **Motivations**

Sympathizers offer their support for a variety of reasons. Ethnic and tribal loyalties are a strong motivating factor, even when there is general disagreement with the ideology and methods of a group. "He may be a bastard but he is our bastard" is a common attitude in such communities. This link is one of the hardest to break. A percentage of these supporters, including the bulk of the hard core, will of course subscribe to the same ideology as the group, although not usually with the same fervor. This more intellectual link is weaker, however, and can be broken through an information campaign.

Most of the terrorist group's support base is likely to share the same real and perceived grievances that also motivated the terrorists themselves. In fact, these underlying factors are often the most significant personal reason why individuals offer active or passive support to a terrorist group. Dealing with these underlying causes will therefore seriously undermine the bond between terrorist and supporter. Margaret Thatcher once said that a Catholic family with a new car, a nice house, and

enough money for an annual holiday in Spain is far less likely to risk all by offering support to the terrorist than a family with no hope and no prospects.

Wider community support for the terrorist can also be encouraged by real or perceived incidents of bias and overreaction by the security forces. Evidence has shown that reducing the number of these incidents does undermine terrorist support. Fear is also a significant factor that can encourage a community to tolerate the presence of terrorists in their midst and there is plenty of evidence that terrorists will often resort to violence against their own community in order to prevent dissension and desertion.

### **Summary of Critical Factors—Support Base**

- The maintenance of a broad support base is critical to the success of any terrorist campaign.
- Such support can be categorized as either active (a minority) or passive (the majority).
- Terrorist sympathizers and the terrorists themselves usually share broadly similar ethnic and/or ideological backgrounds.
- Sympathizers provide their support for a variety of reasons, the most difficult of which to break is “tribal” loyalty.
- Most other links can be broken by dealing with underlying causes, by winning the War of Ideas, and by aggressive direct action that is seen to be legal and proportionate.

### **Lessons Learned**

#### **Recognize Differences Among Terrorist Supporters**

Most of the terrorist group’s support base comprises passive sympathizers who often give their support because of loyalty, tradition, grievances, and fear, not because of a strong belief in the ideology or the methods of the group. It is therefore vital that passive supporters are not “tarred with the same brush” as the terrorists or their hard-core active sympathizers. Passive supporters can be won over but only if they are treated dispassionately and impartially. When the British treated all Catholics as Republicans, sympathies for the PIRA increased. When they did not, it decreased. This natural tendency to equate shared ethnic identity, similar ideologies (e.g., religion), and passive support as synonymous with terrorism must therefore be avoided at all costs.

### **Implement a Three-Pronged Approach to Counterterrorism**

Separating a terrorist group from its support base will inflict a significant and ultimately fatal blow and must therefore be one of the primary objectives of any counterterrorism strategy. A common theme throughout this paper is the trinity of approaches that must be implemented to achieve this. Effective and robust offensive action must be taken to contain and reduce the immediate threat posed by the terrorists. Such actions must, however, be legal and proportionate, wherever possible, to avoid alienating the very communities we are trying to influence. At the same time, significant efforts have to be directed toward resolving the real underlying causes that motivate so many to join or support a terrorist group. In unison with these other two approaches, a war of ideas must also be fought in order to change and shape the perceptions of a wide range of target audiences. Implemented effectively and over time, this combined approach can defeat or at least reduce the threat of terrorism.



## **IV. COUNTERTERRORISM**

In addition to the counterterrorism lessons identified and listed in the preceding sections, the study team believes that a number of additional key points are worthy of further examination. The lessons deemed to be the most fundamental to the conduct of any counterterrorism campaign are addressed below. Some of these lessons reiterate points made in the preceding section but are presented here from the perspective of the counterterrorism campaign.

### **CREATING THE NECESSARY SECURITY ENVIRONMENT**

#### **Impartiality of the Security Forces**

The first response to the growing civil unrest and climate of protest in 1969 was in the hands of the police force. That force had been able to police most areas of the six counties of Northern Ireland with relatively little open resentment throughout the 1960s but was, as explained earlier in the study, predominately a Protestant force. Many in the force therefore perceived the largely Catholic civil rights movement as a challenge to the political and social status quo and a threat to their somewhat privileged way of life. For some, these concerns were an overriding factor that dominated their initial approach to policing. As a result, the police force reacted disproportionately and with bias against the Roman Catholic community, which viewed the conduct of most police officers as being politically motivated and intended only to sustain the Protestant community's dominance.

When the UK government realized that the situation had to be urgently and decisively resolved, it deployed the military. Many within the Roman Catholic community initially welcomed the arrival of the British Army, and most soldiers were appalled by what they saw in certain areas, where elements of the Protestant community "burned out" their Roman Catholic neighbors and the "tribal map" of the six counties was rigidly redrawn in their favour. This short honeymoon period is of considerable interest because the most often feared "tool of state," the army, was welcomed by a community whose history should have made them implacable foes. This was because at that moment, the army was seen to be operating without bias and applying the law equally to all elements. In time, however, as the government proved unable to determine a timely response to the underlying causes of the problem, and increasing tensions and frustrations began to be exploited by the Provisional IRA, the

army came to be seen by most sections of the Catholic community as little different from the police force: a political arm of the state employed to sustain the interests of one element of the population rather than to dispassionately enforce the law and protect the rights of all the population.

The team's research has highlighted the importance of the security establishment being seen to be impartial in upholding the law and administering justice. On the front line of law and order, the police force and general security establishment has to be seen to be independent and acting to uphold the law on the basis of the rights of all individuals and communities as established by statute. Elements of a community may dispute the appropriateness and efficacy of those laws, as the protesters did in 1969 and from then on, but it is of central importance that the instruments of upholding law and order be seen to have legitimacy and be worthy of the peoples' trust. As one politician observed during an interview with the study team, you can't tell a group that you are bringing it the benefits of your way of life and then fail to adhere to your own rules, denying a community the justice that you reserve for other groups or populations. There has to be a belief in the impartiality and legitimacy of all elements of the security and legal establishment. When there is, as various interviewees pointed out, there will be greater potential acceptance of direct or aggressive actions when they are carried out. Evidence must show that such operations are conducted with only due cause and against specific targets.

### **Professional Image-Making**

Part of ensuring that the role and conduct of the security forces is correctly portrayed and understood is understanding the media and ensuring professional control of the actions of individuals and units. The media are pervasive in the world of modern counterterrorist operations. Their reporting, in content and character, will shape the thinking and perceptions of most people, and the security forces need to have a professional and skilled team to handle the press. In addition, all personnel within the forces must be fully cognizant of their individual role in presenting the desired impression. Apparently minor, tactical-level events may have strategic impact in the world of 24-hour news. Unfortunately, the early British response to the protest movement in Northern Ireland and later to the more direct and violent expression of the Republican grievances and aspirations was all too often pictured in media coverage around the world as the policeman or soldier overreacting to a given event or provocation.

The potential to exploit such overreaction, in order to present the British in a bad light and make them into a "recruiting sergeant" for the terrorists was recognized and seized upon by PIRA. Various examples have been reported of the terrorists and

their supporters specifically seeking to elicit disproportionate response or acts of “revenge” from the police or army in order to gain media coverage as part of an increasingly well-orchestrated media operations campaign. Such actions have to be prevented if the security establishment is to create and sustain a standing of professionalism and impartiality in the eyes of the majority of all elements of the population and international community. The British Army eventually recognized this, but it may be fair to say that training to suppress and correct the mindset that appeared to be at the root of such negative and unprofessional conduct was not implemented with sufficient genuine intent until the late-1970s/early-1980s.

### **Security Architecture—Primacy**

In addition to the requirement to establish the correct environment in terms of the public perception of an impartial and professional security infrastructure, the British also had to establish a new security and intelligence infrastructure or architecture. The terrorists posed a threat not only to law and order, but also to national security. As a result, the security response involved a variety of organizations and agencies from all levels of local and national administration. In this multiagency environment, the most urgent issue to be addressed was that of primacy. During the transitional phase from protest to terrorist violence, primacy rested with the police force. Following the deployment of the military and concerns about the impartiality of the police, primacy was handed to the military, whose leaders appeared to have an incomplete understanding of the complexities of the issues involved and who moved in and out of Northern Ireland on short tours of duty.

As the government’s perspective of the nature of the problem and its long-term resolution changed, primacy was returned to the police in a policy that became known as the “Ulsterization” of the security establishment. Then, in 1987, as a result of a succession of terrorist successes in the border counties, the Prime Minister directed that a ‘border zone’ be established within which the military would take the lead once more. As a result, for a short period of time, a line was drawn on the map 3 km in from the border. It was intended that on one side of the line the police had primacy, on the other the military held the lead. The situation was unsustainable and lasted for only a short period before the concept was abandoned and full primacy restored to the police.

Finally, since the early 1990s there have been ongoing discussions about primacy, specifically in the intelligence field. Some believe that, as is the case in the rest of the UK, the Security Service (there is no single US equivalent as it combines elements of the FBI, Secret Service, and Justice Department) should have primacy in terrorist intelligence matters in Northern Ireland as it is a question of national security

rather than straight law and order. This issue is currently unresolved but it is expected that the Security Service will get primacy.

The clear message that came out of the team's research was that the primacy question has to be resolved early in any campaign that involves a number of different organizations and agencies. The British experience was that rivalries and different agendas, resulting from a variety of motivations, hampered the creation of the appropriate security architecture and agreement on strategies until primacy was clearly established. The history of the security force counterterrorist campaign prior to the establishment of a clear police lead was littered with examples of organizations working for different short-term goals, of the duplication of effort, and of nugatory effort, all with the inherent risk of "friendly fire" incidents.

### **Holistic National Strategy**

Last, but by no means least when considering the establishment of the correct security environment, is the necessity to determine a national strategy, which outlines the desired end state and how to get there in policy terms. As has been made clear earlier in the paper, the security response to a terrorist threat should be part of a coherent overall response. A holistic strategy should address the causes of the terrorist threat and ensure that the threat is met, leaving its perpetrators with a clear understanding that they will not achieve their aims through violence. It is the view of the team that, in Northern Ireland, neither side was capable of achieving its aims through direct confrontation. Indeed, it was not until the UK government began to realize that the long-term answer lay as much in political, social, and economic counters to the terrorist threat that the situation showed any sign of having some kind of resolution. That resolution has, in the UK example, arguably been found in an acceptance of a national strategy of removing the threat of terrorism rather than in the defeat of the terrorist.

### **Critical Factors—Creating the Necessary Security Environment**

- In the early days, the security forces were perceived as being biased, as the tool of one group to be deployed against another and of not upholding law and order with impartiality.
- An element of the problem regarding public perception and the absence of trust was improper handling of the media and the terrorists use of public relations traps and provocation designed to elicit overreaction from the security forces.
- For many years the British political and security establishment failed to address and effectively resolve the issue of primacy in a multiagency security

environment. This inhibited the determination of agreed strategies, risked duplication of and nugatory effort, and increased the risk of friendly fire.

- There was a failure to recognize the requirement for a holistic strategy that addressed the causes of terrorism as well as its execution. In such a strategy, the security response to the threat would be important but would not be the only approach.

## **Lessons Learned**

### **Ensure Impartial Application of the Law**

Security planners and commanders must ensure the impartial application of the law and any other appropriate codes of conduct by the security forces. There should also be a reasonable degree of visibility and accountability of the security establishment. Security planners must establish training to ensure an unbiased mindset and an understanding of the complexities of the environment into which forces are deployed.

### **Let a Professional Team Handle Media Relations**

The security forces must have a professional team to handle the media, including both the management of its activities on the ground and the correct use of its potential. All personnel and planners must be alert to PR traps and to the risk of overreaction to any provocation. Training must be in place to prepare all personnel for such dangers and eventualities.

### **Establish an Operational Lead**

The government must address the problem of primacy among multiple organizations, many of which may be used to working independently. A single focus and lead at all levels has to be established.

### **Devise and Implement a Holistic Approach**

Political leaders must determine the aim of their national policy and the desired end state. They should then determine a holistic strategy not only to ensure that the terrorist violence is countered but also to address the causes of that terrorism. While security must be a key element of that strategy, the long-term resolution of the causes will also depend on the right political, social, and economic policies.

## **SECURITY FORCE STRUCTURE/CAPABILITIES**

Terrorism poses a different type of challenge to the security establishment, particularly where it is manifest within a state's own sovereign boundaries. It presents both a threat to law and order and a threat to national security. Since the late-1970s, the murder rates have been higher in some UK constabulary jurisdictions

than they have been in Northern Ireland. The crucial difference is that these crimes are not being committed in a coordinated manner by one entity with the intention of threatening the state, its national security, or its national integrity.

The nature and manifestation of this complex threat brought a number of organizations and agencies into the arena for the first time: the civil police force, the military, the UK's Security Service, other national intelligence collection agencies, Customs, and the Inland Revenue. The potential for divergence of agenda, conflict of interest and duplication was very real, and based on the study team's research it is fair to say that the UK security establishment has experienced all of these problems to some degree since 1969. The first and key aspect of addressing the problem is to establish which organization has primacy. Once primacy is established—and it has been shown to be an iterative process—the necessary security structure or architecture may then be determined.

### **Analysis of Capability Requirements**

In the early months and years after 1969, the security establishment was forced to react in real time to emerging threats. It therefore had to learn “on the job” while also having to commit all its efforts to the day-to-day conduct of the campaign against an increasingly murderous threat. Phrases such as “seat of the pants” management and “running to stand still” have been coined by some, in interviews, to sum up the realities of the time. As a result, whereas individual commanders analyzed what was required for their mission in their area of responsibility, little if any effort was invested in a theaterwide analysis of capability requirements to meet the threat. There followed an iterative process of trial and error in determining what force elements were required to meet and counter the threat, which continued to evolve for the entire ensuing period.

Over time, initially in response to each new manifestation of the threat, and more latterly in anticipation of the same, security planners conducted a de facto analysis of capability requirements. As the terrorist threat has existed alongside “ordinary” crime, and because the sustaining of a terrorist campaign necessitates the perpetrating of apparently ordinary crime, conventional police capabilities have always formed the foundation of the security response in Northern Ireland. Given the nature of the threat, however, and the requirement to react in ways not usually associated with the function of policing in a Western democracy, the requirement for an additional capability, over and above that of the police, was recognized early in the “troubles.”

Some interviewees examined the idea that, in the face of such a requirement, there should have been an ability to respond with an intermediate capability before resorting to the army. In hindsight, many of the duties that the army has been called upon to perform, such as dealing with civil disorder, have been deemed to be inappropriate for a military force in a Western democracy. In the UK example, however, there is no intermediary force between the conventional police force and the military. As a result of this capability gap, in the view of many of those interviewed, both the police force and military have had to operate in ways that are arguably inappropriate. That is, the police force has operated far too high up a scale of aggressive response and the military has operated too low down that scale.

By way of contrast, in Spain the paramilitary Guardia Civil has been able to fulfill many of the counterterrorism duties performed by the British army in Ulster without the necessity to involve the Spanish army. Chief amongst its virtues has been its ability to operate in the rural environment where police expertise is limited and resources are insufficient. In Northern Ireland, this role had to be fulfilled largely by the British Army.

As a result of this iterative process the UK has finally developed a comprehensive array of capabilities in response to given needs. It is, however, the view of the team that, had a comprehensive assessment of capability requirements been entered into as a specific coherent policy at the outset of the “troubles,” many of these needs would have been identified or anticipated much earlier in the campaign. This may have facilitated more effective planning, training, and fielding of capabilities in a more-timely manner.

#### **Allocation of Functional Areas of Operation—Troops to Task**

The police have been able to fulfil many of the requirements identified as a result of iterative capability assessments with relatively minor additions to their training, but the military has had to fulfil most other requirements because of their scale, cost, or required skill sets.

Over and above normal activities, the Northern Ireland police force has developed specific capabilities such as the Special Branch (addressed below under the Intelligence War) and the Terrorist Finance Unit. It has also trained all of its members in the overt response to terrorist incidents and how to conduct their normal duties in the face of a constant threat from the terrorists. A number of tasks were deemed unsuitable for the police, however, either because they were thought to be inappropriate activities for a police force or because the nature and scope of the requirement necessitated the involvement of a national agency, with its greater

resources and economies of scale. In some cases, this assessment has been revised over time. Examples of such activities that the police force has not been deemed able, or suited, to address have included aspects of overt and covert intelligence operations (addressed below); explosive ordinance disposal; engineering tasks across the spectrum of mobility and countermobility operations; aspects of transport and mobility (ground and air); maritime operations; some aspects of search operations; large-scale physical countermeasure research and development; the provision of certain technical countermeasures, and some large scale IT and communications infrastructure projects. These tasks, almost by default in many instances, have fallen to the military. The military has also had to train its personnel in the conduct of various other duties which, anywhere else in the UK, would be the remit of the police force because of the Northern Ireland force's inability to conduct normal police work in areas of particularly high threat.

In the absence of an intermediary force, the military have also been charged with restoring of law and order in the event that civil disorder exceeds the capacity of the police to respond or, in what both police and military commanders have said was the worst case, to simply supplement police numbers, with soldiers acting as policemen, in cases of widespread civil disorder. All parties deemed such arrangements to be undesirable, causing both forces to be seen in the wrong light, but they conceded that these arrangements might be unavoidable the absence of an alternative.

Interviewees commented that, given the benefit of hindsight, they should have undertaken a full, coherent, and detailed assessment of capability requirements at the earliest possible stage and allocated areas of responsibility to the organization that was deemed most appropriate or best suited to furnish that capability. Better still many agree that an intermediary force (e.g. Guardia Civil) should have been formed to meet these challenges.

### **Critical Factors—Security Force Structure/Architecture**

- The process of assessing the capabilities required to counter a terrorist threat has been largely iterative. Although this process has resulted in the eventual creation of a highly effective complement of capabilities, the creation of this capability set was not the result of an early and coherent analysis of needs.
- The failure to conduct a coherent needs analysis has meant that both the police and army have been required to conduct tasks for which they are not best suited.



- With hindsight many interviewees agreed that a paramilitary force like the Guardia Civil should have been created to undertake the high end of the law enforcement contribution to counterterrorism and the low end of the military's contribution.

## **Lessons Learned**

### **Conduct a National-Level Needs Analysis**

Once the existence and extent of a terrorist threat has been identified, a national-level analysis of capability requirements should be conducted. The aim should be first to determine which capabilities are required and then to identify which organizations and agencies would be best suited to fulfill each task. Once areas of responsibility for specific capabilities are established, training must reflect these allocations.

### **Establish a Third Force**

It is clear that law enforcement agencies are not best suited to carry out a range of offensive counterterrorist operations against terrorist groups. The absolute requirement for a police force to operate within the rule of law and to be seen to be completely impartial often precludes direct actions that must then fall to the military. Conversely, many of these operations actually fall at the low end of the spectrum for a military force, and can compromise its reputation and public standing. The use of the army particularly for domestic terrorist threats is also an unnecessary and undesirable escalation that could bring the military into conflict with a segment of the community it is sworn to protect. The existence of a paramilitary force would, however, provide capabilities that do not fit the desired roles of either the military or the police. This may therefore be an appropriate model to follow.

## **SECURITY FORCE ARCHITECTURE—COMMAND AND CONTROL**

Having achieved a working resolution to the question of primacy in the multiagency security environment and finally achieved an analysis of capability requirements, the next essential area of security force architecture is command and control. This issue is central to optimizing the utility of the skill sets and capabilities, which the different organizations and agencies bring to the counterterrorist campaign and to maximizing operational effectiveness.

### **The Early Days**

Given the nature of the early days of the security operation post 1969, which was essentially crisis management, it is no surprise that the command and control infrastructure or architecture was developed ad hoc and amid considerable discord.

Underlying tensions and suspicions developed between the police and the military and the deployment of the latter was seen by some as an acceptance that the police were not up to the task and that central government distrusted their impartiality. On the ground, things frequently came to a head with open dispute and conflict between commanders from the military and police who were in broad terms of equivalent rank and between whom no clear command relationship had been established. This situation was even worse where there were overlapping operational boundaries. The military and police approach to any given incident was also frequently different and significant arguments have been known to have occurred at Incident Control Points.

The failure to establish clear lines of C2 also resulted in security force elements with coincident operational areas of responsibility following different agendas and strategies. The resultant conflicts, duplication of effort, sometimes-nugatory effort, and disconnect of operational procedures and practices significantly inhibited the overall effectiveness of the security community. While operational successes were achieved and the situation was made to work, this was often in spite of, rather than being facilitated by, formal C2 arrangements and was excessively dependent on the personal relationships between equivalent ranked commanders.

### **Primacy—Potential Downside**

The requirement for primacy to be determined and clearly established has been discussed earlier in this paper. In terms of command and control on the ground, however, primacy can be exercised in a manner that fails to draw the best from each organization or agency. This occurs when an individual or organization interprets primacy too rigidly or dogmatically. At different times in the chronology of the allocation of primacy, both lead organizations in the security community, the police and the military, have been accused of such an approach. Often, owing to frustrations borne out of an unrefined understanding of C2 in a multiagency security environment, individuals have been unwilling to enter into discussion with and accept advice from senior individuals from partner organizations who were experts in their own field. Rather, they have felt that the correct exercise of primacy required the tactic of immutable, unquestionable command. This approach, whenever exercised, was reportedly counterproductive and failed to encourage the best use of available expertise.

### **The Committee System**

In order to overcome primacy problems an effective committee system was developed. In the view of the research team, and notwithstanding traditional skepticism of the committee approach, this approach has proved to be an extremely

effective way to exercise C2 in a multiagency environment. At every level of command, from army major/police superintendent level to army General Officer Commanding/Chief Constable level, committees were established. At the operational level of command and below they were titled “Action Committees,” Above this level was the Security Policy Meeting (SPM), chaired by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and including the police Chief Constable and army General Officer Commanding among its members.

These committees comprised the relevant ranked personnel/officers from each major organization, which contributed to security operations at that committee’s level of command. The committees, below the SPM, were and are chaired by members of the police force in whom primacy was vested. These committees were intended to be a forum in which operations were discussed, problems aired, decisions taken, and direction issued. There was a general understanding and acceptance of the fact that all contributors were, in their own areas, experienced and brought with them specific expertise. In such an environment, exchanges, while remaining professional, could be and often were frank and direct, as is appropriate when issues potentially affecting lives are being discussed. The intended outcome of each meeting was an agreed understanding of the threat and an agreed security strategy for the relevant area of operations to run until the ensuing meeting. Given the complexity and dynamism of the situation, these formal meetings were supplemented with frequent, at times daily smaller group or one-on-one sessions, but in the view of the study team the committee system has been shown to be operationally effective, optimizing the benefits of a multiagency environment while minimizing its dangers.

#### **Critical Factors—Security Force Architecture, Command and Control**

- During the early days of the security campaign, C2 arrangements reflected a failure to understand the complexities of a multiagency environment. The absence of clear primacy/command responsibilities were often compounded by military and police equivalents having different boundaries and areas of responsibility.
- Differences in training and operational perspectives frequently resulted in friction and open conflict between commanders from different organizations over the way to respond to given events.
- Some commanders adopted a rigid interpretation of primacy believing it to mean Command Authority, which resulted in conflict and a failure to utilise all assets effectively

- In order to resolve the problems of primacy and geographical boundaries an effective committee system was introduced which optimised the benefits of the multiagency environment while minimising its difficulties. The committee system does however need to be supplemented with additional interaction as and when necessary.

## **Lessons Learned**

### **Maximize Resources**

Issues related to primacy and boundaries for equivalent level commanders must be resolved at the earliest opportunity. More senior officers in each organization, particularly those who hold security primacy, must be schooled in how to manage the potential and capabilities of the other organizations. The training of all ranks in each component organization must also include an appropriate level of explanation and understanding of the operating procedures and capabilities of the other organizations.

### **Implement a Structured Committee System**

All components of the security establishment should have a formal vehicle by which they can fully contribute to the interpretation of the operational environment and to the formation of security policy, at their level. This has been shown to be best exercised through a structured committee system. Given the dynamic nature of the security environment in a counterterrorist campaign the committee system will have to be supplemented by small groups or one-on-one meetings, and relationships should be established which facilitate and encourage such interaction.

## **THE INTELLIGENCE CAMPAIGN**

Our research showed that the key issues that impacted the intelligence campaign against the PIRA and ETA broadly mirrored those that affected the security community as a whole. Given the crucial importance of the initial campaign to the overall counterterrorist strategy the insights gained in this area warrant specific focus.

### **Intelligence Primacy and Policy Direction**

Primacy in the conduct of the intelligence campaign in Northern Ireland was eventually vested in the police, specifically the police Special Branch. Mirroring the approach to C2 in the overt operational environment, a number of committees and formalized regular contacts were established in order to seek unity of purpose and understanding. Given the nature of the security concerns of the intelligence community, these multiagency intelligence committees existed only at the higher levels of command. Each committee met weekly or monthly both to address the

day-to-day conduct of the intelligence campaign at the policy level and to agree on an interpretation of the threat. The outcome was a jointly agreed assessment document produced for senior security and political customers in Ulster as well as in London, including the Cabinet Office intelligence secretariat.

Based on the interviews we conducted, the study team determined that the committee system worked extremely well. The team noted, however, that this system was built upon—and to a degree was dependent upon—individual interpersonal relationships and the willingness of some key individuals to invest greater unofficial trust and openness in their counterparts than officialdom formally sanctioned. The appointment of key individuals seemed to be made with this essential requirement to “oil” the workings of the intelligence machine in mind and, de facto, it worked and worked very well.

The one committee that arguably had the greatest potential to impact on the overall conduct of the intelligence campaign was not formed until 30 years after the commencement of the “troubles” in 1969. This committee comprised the heads or senior representatives of the intelligence policy and assessment groups together with the equivalents from the collection agencies. Its aim was to establish a degree of professional collection management whereby information requirements across all organizations and major customers were confirmed, and the collection agency best placed to fill those requirements was determined. Whenever a gap in access to fill a requirement was noted, the necessary commanders were present to determine which agency would take the lead in addressing it. While such collection management structures had existed in other “conventional” theaters for many years, the nature and intended conduct of the committee’s business was against the traditional procedural approach of many attendees who were from an intelligence operations rather than intelligence assessment background. Interviewees noted the potential of this committee and applauded its purpose, but they agreed that it had never quite fully matched the task it was given.

Notwithstanding the above, in the dynamic environment of counterterrorist intelligence there has been constant discussion relating to primacy and aspects of command and control within the Northern Ireland theater. There has been some suggestion that there should be a split in responsibility, placing primacy for intelligence direction and assessment in the hands of the UK’s Security Service at the politico-strategic level, while primacy in most operational matters would remain with the police -- similar to, though oversimplifying, the situation in the rest of the UK.

## **Intelligence Operations Command and Control**

In the specific area of intelligence operations -- gathering and exploitation, rather than policy direction and assessment -- many of the interagency battles over primacy and command and control were most vigorously joined. While the broad considerations and implications mirrored those within the remainder of the security community, the life-threatening nature of most of the operations and nationally sensitive nature of the collection means employed made this almost inevitable. As in all other aspects addressed above, primacy had to be determined and, as in all other areas, was placed with the police—in this case the Special Branch. The Special Branch was divided into regions, and each Regional Head of Special Branch (RHSB) commanded a Regional Source Unit (RSU), which managed all human and certain other collection operations including military HUMINT activities. Also under the RHSB was the Tasking and Coordination Group (TCG). No covert operational activity could be undertaken in a police region without being run through, or by the TCG, which also had under its control specialist elements of the military's intelligence operations capabilities.

Through this C2 structure, the RHSB effectively became the executive level of command for intelligence operations, with the TCG arguably the single most important coordination, command and control organization within the intelligence community and perhaps the whole security community. Manned largely by police officers, they had specialist military liaison officers accredited to them in addition to elements of the specialist military HUMINT units. The result was, to a degree, an inclusive, participatory structure but one that worked to clearly established lines of command and control.

## **Critical Factors—Primacy, Command and Control in the Intelligence Community**

- Command and control for both the general intelligence community and covert collectors was poor in the early days of the campaign. Indeed, the tensions and frictions may have been greater in these highly sensitive and dangerous areas than was the case elsewhere.
- Once primacy was placed in the hands of the police Special Branch, a committee structure was established at the appropriate level of access to manage and direct the intelligence campaign.
- At police Regional and military brigade, the Regional Head of Special Branch was the executive level of command for all intelligence operations with

military liaison officers accredited to him from brigade-level headquarters and from specialist units.

- The committee system was deemed to have functioned extremely successfully, but the team noted the degree to which this success was founded on a more informal and unofficial level of interchange between key individuals. This necessitated ensuring that the right man was placed in the right post to facilitate effective personal relations.
- The Regional Source Units and Regional Tasking and Coordination Groups are deemed to be among the most important and successful innovations of the campaign, revolutionizing the management and tasking of intelligence assets and the coordination of intelligence operations.
- The recent creation of a very high-level collection management committee is a belated but very positive development that will ensure that all regional and national collectors are fully coordinated and deconflicted.

## **Lessons Learned**

### **Strategic Direction**

Policy makers and political leaders must be sufficiently robust to ensure that questions relating to primacy and to command and control in the crucial sphere of counterterrorist intelligence work are overcome swiftly.

### **Intelligence C2**

At the executive level of command in intelligence operations, C2 has to be particularly well defined, but the commander must still be afforded informed and expert contributions to the exercise of his function from experienced representatives of the specialist units over which he will have control. There is also crucial need to ensure professional collection management at the strategic, operational, and tactical levels. Although a committee system is probably the most effective means of achieving such inclusive and participatory C2, it must be structured at the right level of access and must not widen a given circle of knowledge to a level that creates unnecessary risk to life or national collection means. Given the essential underpinning of informal relationships in the intelligence community it is evident that careful selection be undertaken for key appointments to these committees. Within each geographic area of operations there must also be a single focus for all collection activity and a single focus for all covert operations, to which and through which all other agencies will work.





## **GLOSSARY**

AOR	Area of Responsibility
ASU	Active Service Unit (smallest cell in revised PIRA structure)
C2	Command and Control
CP	Check Point
ETA	Euskadi ta Askatasuna
GHQ	General Headquarters (Senior Operational Command level in PIRA)
HQs	Headquarters
HUMINT	Human Intelligence
IED	Improvised Explosive Device
IMINT	Imagery Intelligence
IRA	Irish Republican army
NCOs	Non-Commissioned Officers
OC	Officer Commanding
PAC	Provisional Army Council
PIRA	Provisional Irish Republican army
POW	Prisoner of War
PSYOPS	Psychological Operations
QM	Quarter Master
QMG	Quarter Master General
R&D	Research & Development
RHSB	Regional Head of Special Branch
RSU	Regional Source Unit
SAMs	Surface to Air Missile
SIGINT	Signals Intelligence
SPM	Security Policy Meeting
TCG	Tasking and Coordination Group
TO&E	Table of Organization and Equipment
UK	United Kingdom
VBIED	Vehicle Borne Improvised Explosive Devices



REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE				Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188	
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1. REPORT DATE (DD-MM-YY) September 2004		2. REPORT TYPE Final		3. DATES COVERED (From – To)	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE Understanding Terrorism, Lessons of the Past—Indicators for the Future				5a. CONTRACT NO. DASW01-98-C-0067	
				5b. GRANT NO.	
				5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NO(S).	
6. AUTHOR(S) William E. Cralley, Andrew Garfield, Dr. Carlos Echeverria				5d. PROJECT NO.	
				5e. TASK NO. BB-6-2279	
				5f. WORK UNIT NO.	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) Institute for Defense Analyses 4850 Mark Center Drive Alexandria, VA 22311-1882				8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NO. IDA Paper P-3884	
9. SPONSORING / MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) Studies Coordinator Office of the Director, Net Assessment Room 3A930, Pentagon				10. SPONSOR'S / MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)	
				11. SPONSOR'S / MONITOR'S REPORT NO(S).	
12. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for public release; distribution unlimited.					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES					
14. ABSTRACT The paper addresses lessons learned from British experiences with the Irish Republican Army (IRA) and Spanish experiences with the Basque terrorist organization Euzkadi Ta Azkatasuna (ETA). The paper also identifies applications of these lessons to the current war on terrorism. The paper was based on numerous interviews with persons who have dealt with the IRA and ETA over the years.					
15. SUBJECT TERMS IRA, PIRA, ETA, PSYOPS, Terrorism, Intelligence, Counterterrorism					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT  UU	18. NO. OF PAGES  146	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON Ms. Rebecca Bash
a. REPORT U	b. ABSTRACT U	c. THIS PAGE U			19b. TELEPHONE NUMBER (Include Area Code) (703) 697-1312

